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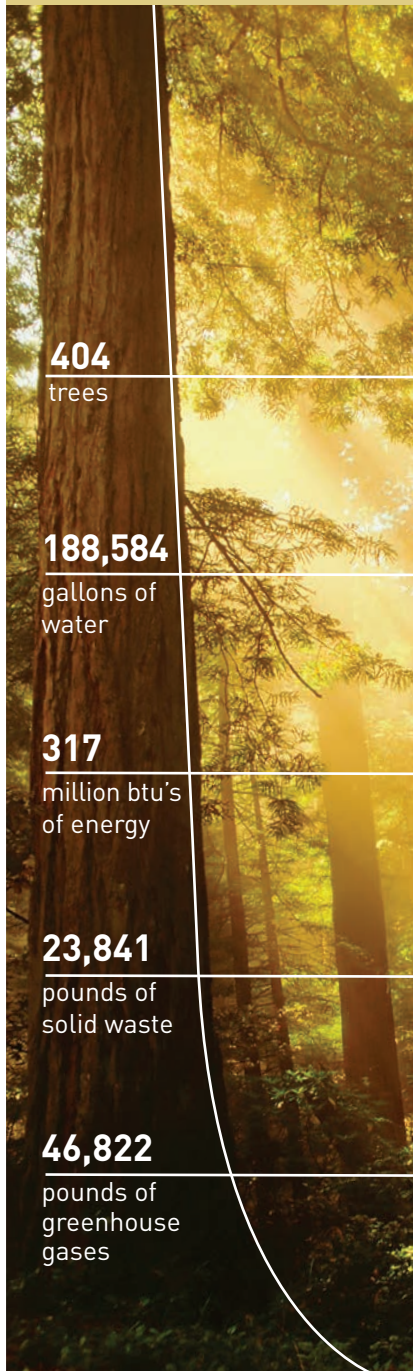
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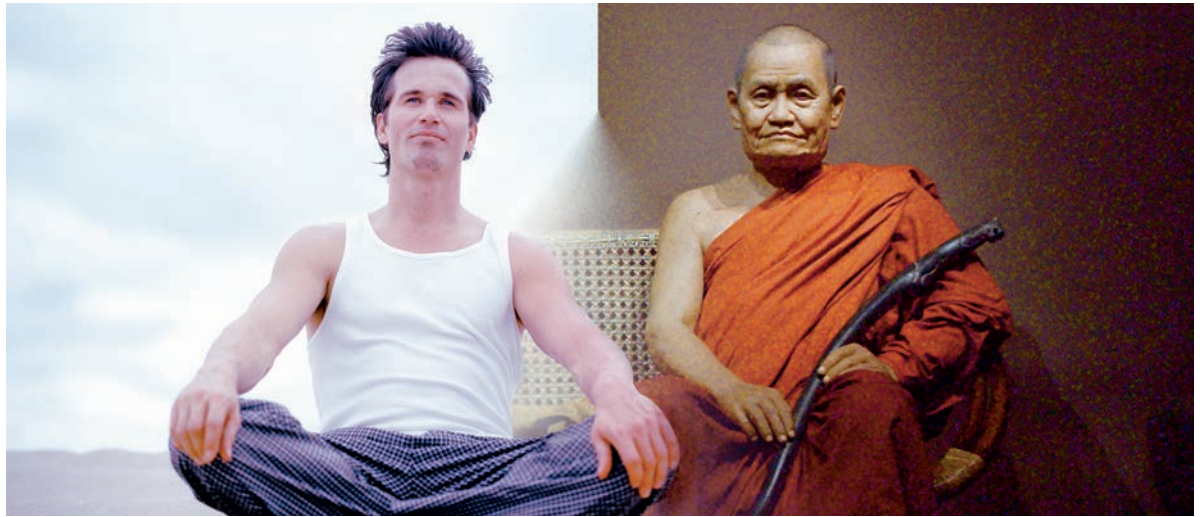
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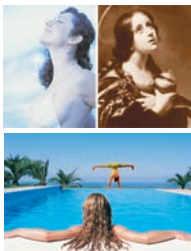
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SPECIAL FEATURE **SPIRITUALITY vs. RELIGION**



Waged in isolated skirmishes for decades, the battle between progressive spirituality and traditional religion is exploding into mainstream culture like never before. And its outcome hinges on just one question: When it comes to navigating the spiritual life, who is the ultimate authority? The church? The guru? Or . . . you?



SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS 54 **Moving Beyond Postmodern Spirituality**

Contemplating the state of spirituality, one of *WIE*'s senior editors asks: Could the growing trend to seek the sacred outside of religious traditions be the harbinger of a new era in global consciousness?
by Elizabeth Debold

LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND FLEXIBLE 64 **An Excursion into America's Newest Yoga Trend**

Money, power, fashion, celebrities, and luxury spas. No, it's not the life of Ivana Trump; it's the modern world of yoga.
by Maura R. O'Connor

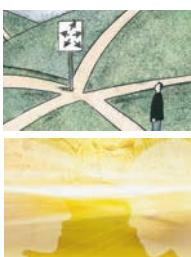


IN SEARCH OF MY PERFECT TEACHER 72

Filmmaker Lesley Ann Patten chronicles her own spiritual odyssey as she attempts to come to terms with her Tibetan Buddhist guru, Dzongsar Rinpoche—the man she has hired to “assassinate” her.
by Jessica Roemischer

REAL GURUS “COULDN'T CARE LESS” 80 **An Interview with Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche**

With surprising candor, this unusual Tibetan Buddhist master reveals why it isn't easy being a guru in the twenty-first century.
by Andrew Cohen



MORAL HIERARCHY 88 **The Key to Evolving Consciousness**

A contemporary philosopher argues for a new model of guru-disciple relationship—one that sees equality in hierarchy while opening a doorway to the evolution of the soul.
by Jason D. Hill

THE TRANSMISSION OF CONSCIOUSNESS 96 **Reviving the Role of the Spiritual Master** **An Interview with Dr. Dario Salas Sommer**

In a culture resistant to religious authority, this renowned Hermetic philosopher, author, and spiritual teacher passionately reaffirms the necessity and meaning of true spiritual discipleship.
by Jessica Roemischer

FEATURES



THE GURU AND THE PANDIT **LAYING THE TRACKS FOR A MOVING TRAIN** 42

Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber

In their eleventh dialogue, Cohen and Wilber pursue one question from the depths of mystical experience to evolution's creative edge: What creates authentic—and *sustained*—transformation in human beings?



BEYOND LIMITS **THE ULTIMATE BLACK BELT TEST** 104

An Interview with Tom Callos

At a time when the gospel of self-acceptance is leading to ever-lowering expectations, an audacious martial arts training program strives to replace mediocrity with mastery.

by Ross Robertson



NOT JUST A BOOK REVIEW **GETTING CLEAR ABOUT ENLIGHTENMENT** 112

Arjuna Ardagh's Translucent Revolution

One of *WIE's* Gen-Y editors offers a hard-hitting critique of the latest iteration of Boomer spirituality.

by Tom Huston

DEPARTMENTS

9 LETTERS

12 EDITORIAL

SKY TO STREET

news from an emerging culture

14 **The New Age of Islam**

An enterprising Turkish webzine fans the winds of change in the Middle East.

16 **Getting to a Deeper YES**

Higher wisdom goes to Harvard Law School.

18 **An MTV That Enlightens and Uplifts?**

The music television superpower unveils an eco-travel show, a Holocaust documentary, and mini-films promoting spiritual awareness.

20 **"Dear God, Please Bless Mr. Bush . . ."**

Are millions of Americans secretly influencing U.S. politics through prayer?

22 **Turn On, Tune In, Wake Up**

A new plan for a televised State of the World Address intends to use mass media to tackle global problems.

26 **PULSE: Catching the buzz from global leaders, thinkers, teachers, and mystics**

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's stress relief for Iraq; Ken Wilber's new spectrum of consciousness; James Gardner's *Dreams of a Cosmic Community*; Amma TV; and more.

30 **PULPIT: Dadi Janki**

A Vision of Soul Consciousness

The spiritual leader of the Brahma Kumaris describes how her teacher awakened her to the life Divine.

From an interview by Jessica Roemischer

VOICES FROM THE EDGE

presenting the visions and values of a new global culture

34 **KAREN ARMSTRONG**

A New Axial Age

A world-renowned theologian explains why, at this pivotal cultural moment, humanity may be on the verge of a new religious era.

Interview by Jessica Roemischer

38 **RABBI MARC GAFNI**

The Evolution of Divinity

An unconventional Jewish leader paints a compelling portrait of a "messianic" spirituality in which the creative principle itself is depending on us.

122 **NATURAL SELECTION**

Reviews of books, film, and other media

136 **ENLIGHTENMENT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

Good Old-Fashioned Virtues for a New World

by Andrew Cohen



Issue 30
September–November 2005

ONE WITH THE PROCESS OF CREATION

I was deeply touched by Andrew Cohen's "The Eternal Declaration." He hit upon the next stage of spiritual evolution, where we identify the Self with the Process of Creation, the impulse of evolution. I believe that a new species of human is emerging—*Homo universalis*, *Homo noeticus*, *Homo spiritus*, *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Aurobindo called it the Gnostic Human, and wrote of the divinization of the body through the descent of the Supramental and the process of Integral Yoga. Of all those who are now working with these ideas, I believe that Andrew has most clearly expressed the fundamental shift in identity beyond the finite ego or the infinite spirit to our identity as cocreators with the Process itself.

Our planetary system is far from equilibrium; we can destroy our own life support systems or evolve ourselves and experience an ever-expanding future. In this context, our spirituality itself is changing, as you so well describe. My sense is that countless individuals are experiencing the impulse of evolution as their own Self—that's why your work at *WIE* is so important to all of us.

If we are to eventually become universal beings, beyond this womb of earth, the short life cycle of the animal human will no longer be "natural." In fact, biotechnology and nanotechnology will possibly prove not to be natural or

life-affirming within the biosphere, but to be perfectly natural as we become a solar-system- and eventually a galaxy-wide-species, physically. Life extension in a closed system earth might be disastrous, but for a human species being born as a cocreator within a universe of billions of galaxies, it might be perfectly normal.

Interestingly, we are at the threshold of gaining the radical evolutionary powers of life extension and increased intelligence just as we hit a limit to growth on earth and discover the capacity to live and work in outer space. This may indicate a natural planetary process. We have never seen another planet go through a transition from a high-tech, overpopulating, polluting species to a cocreative, coevolutionary species. If there are any others, they will have learned conscious ethical evolution quickly—as we are having to do now.

Barbara Marx Hubbard
via email

TOSS THE NEW AGE COMPOST

Chopra's "synchrodestiny," Redfield's synchronicity, Ragnar's immortality through belief . . . must we suffer these soft-headed, narcissistic, anecdotal exaggerations here? Come on! We hoped for more from *WIE*. Perhaps the next issue should be on crystal healing, and then astrology diets. Then we can just drop *WIE* into the circular file with the rest of the New Age magical compost.

Don't get me wrong—I'm not championing scientific materialism and denying the validity of inner experience and the possibilities of evolutionary spirituality. But the psycho-regression to a childlike view where one fervently believes he can animate the external world with his internal wishes is really just pre-rational faithism. I'm not excluding the possibilities of some rarified subtle energetic resonance, or perhaps a morphogenetic field-like attractive influence. But until this has been distinguished, the superstitious baggage stripped away, and the results proven beyond chance, then it is merely a loose, unproven theory—and if believed without real evidence, a dumbing superstition. Like virgin births and flaming chariots carrying the sun across

the sky, quaint, but not something to base modern dialogues on.

Let's keep to a more rigorous conversation, and then maybe use these soft-headed faiths as a jumping off place for well-deserved jagged humor.

Steve Self
Durango, CO

IF THE BODY IS A THOUGHT, WHY EAT HEALTHY?

I am thoroughly enjoying your latest issue. Being a pseudo-Taoist (I practice aikido, tai chi, and several brands of qi gong), I had to read the Peter Ragnar interview first. How delightful to find someone of some exalted status who believes as I do! Well, almost.

Mr. Ragnar is an intriguing individual. Apparently, no one knows his age, but he IS old, chronologically. Yet he keeps breaking his own records. I find that his views still contain some fear-based perceptions, such as eating a pure, raw-food diet and exercising two hours a day. I too once believed that was necessary, but I do not any longer. He could be right. I could be right. We could both be wrong. And, I sometimes muse, is it possible that we can ALL be right?

In fact, I could be holding up my evolution by not doing as he does. Then again, perhaps, as he says, I am just not yet the master of these things—and, perhaps, since he believes he needs these things, he is not, either. If the body is indeed thought, well...

Jim Fleming
via email

TIMELESSNESS TRANSFORMS

I really appreciate Ken Wilber's comment about timelessness being immortality. One question, please: What or who is it that experiences timelessness? The faculty of perception for a physical entity is the body and mind. Beliefs about timelessness do not erase the fact that it is also a physical experience. When you experience fear, you know how your adrenals flood your body. When you experience love, doesn't your body flutter like butterfly wings? And when there are those moments of feeling timeless, does not your flesh also respond?

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To divorce the body from timeless experience is to divide the universe in half. Every single cell in your body has no choice but to obey your expectations, beliefs, hopes, and mental experiences. Have a bad dream and see how your body perspires and shakes. To hold eternity in your heart without subconscious contradictions is the path to physical immortality—the problem, of course, is that talking about timelessness is quite different from experiencing timelessness. How can you tell the difference? Your physical body radiates a powerful, measurable energy field that indicates how much life is there. Much like a battery-powered lantern, when the light gets dim it dies. And the experience of the timeless is what charges the battery with life.

I don't know why the obvious becomes so complicated, except that most people would rather die than evolve!

Peter Ragnar
via email

MAKING SPIRITUALITY PERSONAL

I love your magazine. It intrigues me greatly, and it's one of the only magazines I will read cover to cover. I've noticed though that most of the articles in it speak about such grand ideas concerning the integration of spirituality across humanity that it never really deals with nuts-and-bolts topics. I'd love to see an article on how spirituality is integrated into people's daily lives—say in relationships. I feel that if people are really going to go from seeking (second tier) to real integration (third tier), dealing with relationship themes is essential.

Are the writers of *WIE* married, in relationships? Or do they brave their path alone? Is it inevitable that after one realizes the complications involved in romantic love, one begins to detach from those needs? You could say these topics are better suited for a more psychological forum, but I have found that even psychologists don't really understand who I am or what I'm about as a spiritual woman. And when people

integrate their spirituality in more and more facets of their lives, relationships are definitely one of those areas that can be quite sticky.

I understand that *WIE* takes a more global approach to spirituality, but if we really want to evolve the world, we need to discuss how it applies at a functional level as well. So—care to get more personal with your readers?

Theresa Riek
Huber Heights, OH

LIBERATION THEOLOGY: A WHOLE NEW VISTA

Your publication is most excellent, and I especially look forward to the conversations between Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber. However, I do not believe that the Judeo/Christian tradition is being presented in its truest, most radical form. It seems to me that the almost universal approach of your periodical is Eastern; even when Christianity is approached, it is from an Eastern point of view.



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Hence the emphasis on monasticism, monastic spirituality, Father Dionysios or Meister Eckhart, etc.

I do not mean this as a critique, but am merely pointing to a missed opportunity. Instead of interviewing another Christian monastic or mystic, I would encourage you to interview someone like Bishop Pedro Casaldaliga of Brazil. Here you would find, I believe, a whole new vista of spirituality, with its starting point not in Wilber's upper-left quadrant but in the lower-right, in the tradition of the prophets (Jesus, Francis, Buber, Levinas, Dorothy Day, etc.). The praxis here is not solitary meditation but having one's face, heart, and soul rubbed in the pain of the peoples of the world. Bearing the cross of Jesus (standing in solidarity with the world) becomes that which most effectively extricates one from one's ego. I would love to see a conversation between Pedro and Andrew Cohen or Carter Phipps—I sense in Andrew a real congruence with what folks like Pedro

are pursuing, and I assure you it would be a dynamo.

Gus Gordon

via email

LETTER FROM AN ORTHODOX PRIEST

As a Christian Orthodox priest, I feel great fellowship with the *WIE* approach. I think it is very significant that people like Andrew Cohen are expressing very clearly and radically, in today's language, the core of spirituality. These writings are powerful, deep, and demanding! The Orthodox hesychastic meditation (from the Greek *hesychia*, peace, silence), also known as the Jesus Prayer, together with the teachings of the Orthodox mystics and the Desert Fathers of Egypt, offers lessons that are remarkably close to what is being said by *WIE*. There are differences, of course—namely, regarding the nature of our deeper "person" to be discovered beyond the death of the ego. But words are mere approximations of the

deeper reality, and now, with the world being threatened by so many dangers, I would like to express a profound word of thanks for your commitment.

Thierry Verhelst

Bruxelles, Belgium



Issue 29

June-August 2005

YOUR BRAIN ON CONSCIOUSNESS

Thanks for your timely and astute survey of the mind-brain debate, especially
continued on page 130

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Andrew Cohen
Founder and
Editor in Chief

Although I have been practicing Hatha yoga seriously for almost two decades, it had been years since I'd been to a yoga class or read a yoga magazine. Then, about nine months ago, I opened up a new *Yoga Journal* that had been left on my desk. I was stunned, like one who had fallen asleep and had awakened to find himself on another planet, in another dimension. It was a world where everyone was beautiful and everyone was rich. In this world there was a popular trend called "spirituality," in which everybody had a personal relationship with their maker and the most important thing, it seemed, was to have a beautiful body and be happy!

Around that same time, I watched an unusual documentary, *Words of My Perfect Teacher* by Lesley Ann Patten, that compellingly portrayed the ups and downs of her relationship with her trailblazing and enigmatic Tibetan guru Dzongsar Rinpoche. The most fascinating thing about the film was how incredibly challenging it was for Dzongsar's Western students to find real faith not only in him but in the possibility of their own transformation. These two unrelated events eventually became the foundation for the issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* that you're holding in your hands.

For a long time, we have been having almost daily discussions in our editorial meetings about a matter that's close to our hearts: the postmodern spiritual predicament. We are concerned about the ever-widening gap between the religious traditions and the contemporary culture of "personal" spirituality, and wonder how we can help bridge that divide. The most recent fruit of our inquiry is this issue's context-setting piece, "Spiritual but Not Religious: Moving Beyond Postmodern Spirituality," by senior editor Elizabeth Debold, supported by Rabbi Marc Gafni's article, "The Evolution of Divinity." Philosopher Jason Hill's plea for the creation of a new model of hierarchy is nothing less than groundbreaking and provides a framework from which to negotiate the complexity of the teacher-student relationship as we move forward in the twenty-first century.

As synchronicity would have it, quite unexpectedly I shared a wonderful afternoon last May with Hermetic philosopher and spiritual teacher Dr. Dario Salas Sommer, who is a legendary figure throughout South America. This gave us an opportunity to include his uncompromising views on the traditional role of the spiritual master, which stand in stark contrast to the prevailing flattening of differences between, as Jason Hill would put it, the "hierarcher" and the "hierarchee." Finally, Tom Huston's hard-hitting review of the popular new book *The Translucent Revolution*, by my friend Arjuna Ardagh, urges us all to reach even higher to create a new future. A future where the ancient traditions will be revitalized so that they are not only protectors of the faith but engines for the evolution of human consciousness. A future where perhaps the experience of transcendence, of higher states, will even catalyze the creation of *new* traditions . . . Enjoy!

Andrew Cohen

sky to street

news from an emerging culture



The New Age of Islam

An enterprising Turkish webzine fans the winds of change in the Middle East

Dateline Ankara: On the highways and byways of the New Age, our latest item takes us not to the mystical crossroads of the etheric or the astral planes but to the earthly plains of Anatolia, where a nation of seventy million Muslims finds itself at a crossroads all its own. That country—modern Turkey—is a geographic crossroads, where the European landmass meets the Middle East; it's a religious and cultural crossroads, where traditional faith and modern secularism converge; it's also a political crossroads, where the most progressive society in the Islamic world is trying to make a historic leap into the European Union. But who knew that now, Turkey is a postmodern *spiritual* crossroads as well, and that the angels, astrologers, and aromatherapists of the New Age are marching from Europe and sailing from America

to colonize the contemporary Muslim spiritual marketplace?

Take, as an example, the story of Hasan Celiktas, a twenty-nine-year-old from Turkey's capital city of Ankara who was inspired to pick up the banner of post-traditional, Western spirituality by his encounter with Ramtha, a 35,000-year-old "entity" channeled by a Tacoma, Washington, housewife. Last year, he and a few friends founded a popular internet magazine called *derKi* (www.derki.com), whose name joins the Turkish word *dergi*, or "magazine," with *ki*, "life energy." Since its humble beginnings, *derKi*'s colorful and eclectic blend of online spiritual investigations and pop-culture commentary, fiction and interviews, essays and reviews has generated some impressive numbers among Islamic youth:

300,000 hits a month from 50,000 individual readers. Articles from a hundred different writers include "Yunus Emre's Humanism," "Quantum Thought Technique," "Top 20 Spiritual Movies," and "Semsu Hor: A Woman-Scented, Elf-Flavoured Fairy Tale." Topics range from renewable energy to the dangers of smoking, from lucid dreaming to high heels and the healing power of cats.

"The multicolored energy of our culture gives Turkey a great potential for adding to the world's spiritual progress and awareness," says Celiktas. "But at the same time, many Turkish people are unaware of the fact that the world is changing rapidly and about to come to a breaking point. They don't realize the significance of our country and of the opportunity we have to help find new solutions." With its emphasis on relatively lightweight spiritual subjects, at first glance *derKi* might seem unlikely to advance the evolution of human consciousness very far—at

"Real spirituality has to apply to real life, and it never promises a rose garden."

least to any Westerner familiar with the limitations of the more superficial aspects of postmodern spiritual fare. Yet Celiktas and his crew of volunteer writers are actually quite sophisticated, displaying a refreshing lack of naïveté and making incisive comments and critiques that apply as accurately to New Agers in America and Europe as they do to their Turkish counterparts.



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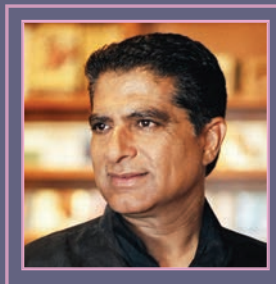
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"In Turkey, New Age spirituality is growing very fast, but we believe that much of this growth is unhealthy," Celiktas explains. "People who are bored of their lives are chasing new identities, buying cell phone covers with yin-yang designs from a corner shop. They learn these concepts and then wear them, saying, 'I've found myself.' But when you look at what most of these people do, you see that they're trying to act like angels with artificial smiles on their faces, but they're not aware of what's going on in the world. Then one day when a shocking event happens, this fake world tumbles down and they find themselves depressed, in a deeper crisis."

As New Age thought and culture spread further and further around the world, it's heartening to see them being met with this kind of open-minded, intelligent skepticism. After all, as Celiktas himself points out, "We like to say that real spirituality has to apply to real life, and it never promises a rose garden." With plans to expand its English edition (available at <http://en.derki.com>), a recently launched internet radio station, and an international spiritual festival in the cards, *derKi* is doing everything it can to make sure that in Anatolia and beyond, Muslims looking for purpose and meaning outside the boundaries of traditional religion can begin to explore what the postmodern West has to offer. Even better, they're striving to filter it all through a perspective big enough to keep this latest generation of seekers from getting stuck there.

Ross Robertson

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Deepak Chopra, President, Alliance for a New Humanity**



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by hundreds of others. And then, with a start, you remember: you are at Harvard Law School attending a workshop on negotiation and conflict resolution.

How did meditation get to Harvard Law School? Harvard Law has long been the training ground for Supreme

Court justices, secretaries of state, senators, and statesmen and -women of all political persuasions. Its graduates become the elite corps who handle the most difficult disputes on the planet. Since 1983, Harvard Law School has housed the Program on Negotiation, the world's leading think tank on negotiation and conflict resolution (an interuniversity consortium comprising Harvard, MIT, and Tufts). And in the last two years, a fledgling project of the Program on Negotiation is bringing something new to seeking peace—inner tranquillity. The Harvard Negotiation Insight Initiative, founded by Erica Ariel Fox, teaches mindfulness practices as essential to the art of conflict resolution. The Insight Initiative's mission is "to broaden and deepen the way we understand, teach, and practice negotiation and dispute resolution by integrating insights from the world's ethical, philosophical, and spiritual traditions." And meditation, Fox asserts, not only is central to achieving that mission but is also enabling negotiators to be more successful in getting to yes.

Getting to Yes, in fact, is the title of the blockbuster bestseller written by Roger Fisher, William L. Ury, and Bruce Patton, who are among the founders of the Program on Negotiation. They revolutionized the practice of negotiation by arguing that the best and most effective way to settle disputes is to break out of aggressively adversarial zero-sum (I win, you lose) dynamics and adopt a win-win—or non-zero-sum—approach. Now, in a rough-and-ready, litigious capitalist society, I-win, you-lose has been the way the game of life is played. We live in a culture where "the Donald" has

become an icon of success for ruling over a dog-eat-dog “reality” TV show that salaciously celebrates competition and betrayal and in a world where armed conflict, simmering violence, and relentless lawsuits are just part of the landscape. But in the midst of all of this, for the past twenty-some years, *Getting to Yes* has sold over one million copies and been translated into eighteen languages—to this day, it sells three thousand copies per week in North America alone. This ever-escalating demand for a positive, win-win approach to settling our differences marks a significant transformation and maturation in humanity’s historical struggle to get along. “Win-win appeals to people’s higher and better nature,” Fox comments. “Fundamentally, people actually do want to operate at a higher level of functioning, and our culture doesn’t give people training in what that looks

The enormous popularity of the win-win strategy has evolutionary implications.

like. They literally don’t know what it would mean to come into what feels like an adversarial situation and do it differently.”

In fact, in the heat of an emotionally charged conflict, even negotiators who have learned the win-win strategy often lose the plot and become competitive. “People understand the idea behind these basic practices of collaboration,” she states. “But it’s not integrated into their being, into who they are. They are just taught a

set of skills. So when the pressure is on and the stakes are high, they fail to respond appropriately and return to their old competitive habits.” Through the Insight Initiative, Fox is teaching negotiators to reach for a deeper reality beneath the surface level of separation. “Win-win is far more than the recognition that ‘if we’re both nice to each other, we’re going to get a better deal,’” she observes. “There’s a spiritual principle underneath win-win that I would call *interconnectivity*, meaning that we’re *really truly* in this together. We are in a shared field of interconnection. If you deeply recognize this, then when you have a conflict with someone, you find yourself in a radically different state of consciousness that could lead to a very different outcome.”

Fox, a lecturer at Harvard Law School, pioneer in the mediation movement, and faculty member of Elat Chayyim, a spiritual retreat center, has struck a nerve with the Insight Initiative. The public forums sponsored by the program—such as a dialogue between Peter Senge and Jon Kabat-Zinn—have packed the halls of Harvard Law. And their

summer trainings have brought together negotiators from all over the world, many of whom have reached a point of crisis in their profession: “Many people are deeply burnt out by overwork and by realizing the futility of conflict practices like litigation, for example, which is emotionally and financially draining—not to mention often futile,” says Fox. “They don’t feel that the work of their hands is actually serving the world in a positive way. More people than we realize have an

interest in something that they might call spiritual, but they’re isolated from each other.” Creating networks to connect these practitioners so they have greater influence is also one of the Initiative’s goals. Fox recognizes “the potential for having global public cultural impact because it’s housed at Harvard, one of the most powerful institutions for shaping society in the world.”

This potential for impact may be what is most significant about the Insight Initiative, because the enormous popularity of the win-win strategy has evolutionary implications. As Robert Wright argues in his influential book *Nonzero*, and as more and more evolutionary theorists are beginning to recognize, win-win tends to be the way evolution happens—through cooperation that benefits all parties. By deepening our understanding of win-win to encompass the fundamental spiritual principle of interconnectivity or Oneness, the Insight Initiative is helping to create a new worldview that may be able to lead us beyond all division. Fox notes that “bringing master spiritual teachers to teach with us here at Harvard is a way to support this evolution. My quest is to tap into the wells of wisdom from the spiritual traditions without all the religious trappings that are not appropriate in this kind of context. And my vision is that in the next five to ten years, there will be an integration of these ideas and of awareness practices in business, in law, in education, in social services—that these deeper dimensions of how to address conflict will become mainstream.” And that would be a win-win for all of us.

Elizabeth Debold

An MTV That Enlightens and Uplifts?

The music television superpower unveils an eco-travel show, a documentary about the Holocaust, and mini-films promoting spiritual awareness



From the moment “Video Killed the Radio Star” hit the airwaves in 1981, MTV has been condemned as the bane of popular culture. Indeed, just last February, the Parents Television Council released a report in which they tallied 2,881 verbal references to sex and 3,056 flashes of sexual imagery in a single week of programming. It’s no wonder that critics claim the global television network (MTV was recently launched in Africa, a continent that has one of the lowest numbers of

televisions per capita in the world) has debased the morality of an entire generation brought up in the glow of its music videos and sensationalistic programming. As one reviewer from the *National Review* put it, MTV has made America’s youth “deaf to all higher culture and blind to all hope or beauty.”

But the next time you settle in to watch *Total Request Live* or *Pimp My Ride*, pay attention to the commercial breaks. There amid the mindless plugs for hip-hop ring-tones and pimple creams, you may catch a glimpse of a different kind of MTV, one that is covertly using its influential powers for a purportedly higher purpose. In January, the music network launched what it calls “Spiritual Windows”—individual mini-films no longer than fifteen seconds that contain a variety of spiritual imagery and/or philosophical messages which it seeds throughout the day’s programming. Numbering twenty-four in all, each one depicts scenes from nature, moments of prayer, or images from daily religious life.

Some of these “promo spots” have voice-overs, but others use only music to accompany the images. “Rejuvenate,” as one promo is called, simply shows a group of Muslim men praying together at a mosque. In “Everyone,” a Chinese dragon dances on screen while a voice says, “We need

With a star-studded entourage of friends, Cameron Diaz trots the globe raising environmental awareness.

other human beings to be human. I am because other people are.” There’s even a Spiritual Window with Paulo Coelho, author of *The Alchemist*, in which an image of the sun sets over

the pyramids while Coelho says, "The desert will give you an understanding of the world. How do I immerse myself in the desert? Listen to your heart." "Consume Mindfully" depicts a Tibetan nun taking out the garbage at her Buddhist temple, and "Everyday Grace" features a gondolier rowing on the canals of Venice while a disembodied voice says, "Your heart is where your treasure is, and you must find your treasure to make sense of everything."

Though beautifully produced, one has to wonder if *Spiritual Windows* is more gimmick than serious attempt at injecting spiritual awareness into mainstream culture—akin to, say, Urban Outfitters hawking Buddha statues or Barneys selling yoga mat bags. But the vice president of on-air promos for MTV, thirty-seven-year-old Kevin Mackall, disputes this. "We wanted to create little, short moments, almost breaths of peace for the channel," he told the *Chicago Sun-Times*. "There's a genuine appetite for spirituality these days. And that was the mission. We're doing a great job of getting people to watch Ashlee. Now, let's have a moment of reflection." A moment of reflection on the banality of *The Ashlee Simpson Show*? No matter how tastefully executed, it would be hard to take the *Spiritual Windows* campaign seriously if it didn't coincide with a slate of other surprisingly smart and inspirational programs produced by and aired on MTV.

For instance, in March 2005, a weekly series called *Trippin'* was launched. This "eco-travel" show, produced by movie actress Cameron Diaz, includes a revolving star-studded entourage of Diaz's friends, such as rapper DMX, Drew Barrymore, and Kid Rock, who accompany Diaz as she trots the globe visiting nature preserves, endangered species, and threatened ecosystems. Throughout

the half-hour show, factoids appear at the bottom of the screen with information about the environment or useful tips on how to save water or use less electricity in our daily lives. Although the program can seem to pander more toward celebrity worship than deepening environmental awareness, the evolving dynamic between Diaz and her companions in each episode is fascinating. At the beginning, there is a lot of predictably superficial banter between them, but later—disheveled from traveling (there are no make-up people allowed), having learned together about the plight of the planet—an undeniable authenticity emerges. By the end, they all seem genuinely moved by the experiences they've had, and this, in turn, is inspiring for the viewer. One example is an episode in which actress Eva Mendes, after spending the day at a village in Nepal, turns to Diaz and with tears streaming unselfconsciously down her face, says, "Oh my God. We're all just human beings. We all want the same things. I never understood before. We're all just human beings, and it's so beautiful."

Two months after *Trippin'* premiered, MTV aired an hour-long documentary about the Holocaust called *I'm Still Here*. Scheduled to coincide with Holocaust Remembrance Day, *I'm Still Here* deals with the genocide of the Jews through the diaries of young people alive at the time, including some who survived and others who died in the concentration camps. Each diary entry is read by a different celebrity, such as Elijah Wood, Kate Hudson, Brittany Murphy, or Joaquin Phoenix. The cumulative effect of their voices,

the stories they tell, and the documentary footage and photographs is deeply haunting and melancholic. A *New York Times* reviewer wrote that *I'm Still Here* was "inventive and inspiring . . . a masterly documentary and proof that there are still more and decent ways to remember the Holocaust."

Ironically, MTV's efforts to air sophisticated, serious products like *Spiritual Windows*, *Trippin'*, and *I'm Still Here* are highlighting just how

As one reviewer from the *National Review* said, MTV has made America's youth "deaf to all higher culture and blind to all hope or beauty."

debauched and irrelevant its programming usually is. For example, the new series *My Super Sweet Sixteen*, a reality show that follows different rich kids around each week as they make plans for their sixteenth birthday parties, manages to consistently illustrate an almost pathological level of self-obsession and materialism in our culture. MTV has also created the reality series *I Want a Famous Face*, in which young people undergo plastic surgery to make them look like their favorite celebrity. Indeed, when a *Spiritual Window* featuring a Buddhist nun is followed by an ad for Britney Spears' upcoming reality show about her life with Chihuahua "Bit-bit" and husband Kevin, it becomes clear just how far MTV has to go to raise our culture above the superficiality that it is partly responsible for creating—and that it continues to capitalize on. Despite this, its initial efforts at providing more conscientious, spiritual fare are commendable and, at times, uplifting.

Maura R. O'Connor



denominational, with no affiliation to any political or religious organizations, and insist they will “never be used for political purposes.” Nevertheless, the organization is quite obviously informed by the values and beliefs of what is commonly referred to as the Christian Right. The president and CEO of PPT, John Lind, previously worked with Youth for Christ and the Promise Keepers; the Presidential Prayer Team’s Statement of Faith begins, “We believe in the Holy Scriptures as originally given by God, divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy; and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.” As for their claims to be nonpolitical, let’s just say that after browsing the website, it’s a little difficult to believe that PPT’s fervent enthusiasm would have persisted had John Kerry carried Ohio.

Every week, the website posts a prayer for President Bush, the First Lady, and a selected cabinet member or congressional leader. During the week of June 6–13, for example, members were asked to, “Pray for the President as he meets with British Prime

Minister Tony Blair on June 7, asking God to guide both men with wisdom and grace as they discuss a variety of concerns including Africa, climate change in preparation for the G-8 summit in July, and concerns about Iraq and the Middle East peace process.”

Whether or not the PPT is aiding in the well-being or successful presidency (which is a rather subjective issue) of George Bush cannot be easily determined because previous attempts to validate the powers of prayer through scientific methods have often been contentious. Many researchers and scientists argue that there are simply too many unknown

“Dear God, Please Bless Mr. Bush...”

How 2.8 million Americans may be influencing U.S. politics through prayer

If some of you are still trying to figure out how George Bush, Jr., won the election in 2004, there may have been a force at work that the political pundits didn’t take notice of and the polls couldn’t measure—prayer. It turns out that no less than 2.8 million Americans were praying for George Bush in November ‘04—all of them organized by a nonprofit called the Presidential Prayer Team. PPT’s website, presidentialprayerteam.com, was launched on September 18, 2001, when founder Bill Hunter realized that President Bush and his cabinet mem-

bers badly needed moral and spiritual support at the onset of the “war on terrorism.” In just two months, according to PPT, it became the world’s number one religious website, and within six hundred days, it had solicited one percent of the American population to pray on a weekly basis for the President.

PPT believes that the prayers of its members open “a window for God to work in our country as never before” and are therefore capable of radically altering the future of the United States. They claim to be cross-

variables to accurately test the efficacy of prayer. However, polls show that the majority of Americans believe that prayer works in myriad ways, such as relieving physical pain and

history—proof for the first time of the supernatural.

PPT has no intention of waiting around for science, however. They've already launched multiple new projects, including "PPT for Kids" ("President and Mrs. Bush are going to their ranch for the weekend, so it's a great time to pray that God will protect them and

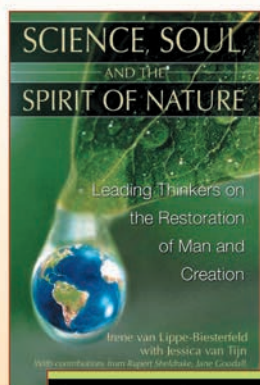
U.S. military to pray for each day. As of this writing, 545,000 "adopters" are praying for over 160,000 troops. Indeed, the future of the Presidential Prayer Team is, as they themselves say, "bright and exciting. As the cutting-edge leader in stimulating national prayer for our elected officials, and with the ever-growing marvels and capabilities of the Internet, there is no limit to what we can envision for the years to come." Indeed, if PPT's numbers continue to grow, 2008 could be a very interesting election—especially when you consider that in 2004, Bush's margin of victory was right around three million votes.

Maura R. O'Connor

“Pray for the President as he meets with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on June 7, asking God to guide both men with wisdom and grace . . .”

curing disease, and can even result in miracles. And if irrefutable proof were found that prayer works, there is no doubt that it would be one of the most significant discoveries in

give them terrific times of refreshment and encouragement while they are there”), and an initiative called “Adopt Our Troops,” where members receive the name of a soldier in the

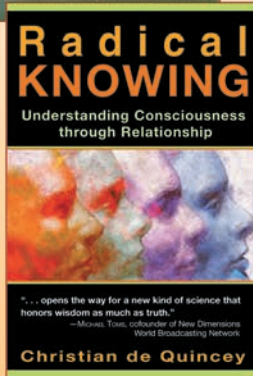


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the World Future Council proposed by Jakob Von Uexkull, the Club of Budapest founded by Ervin Laszlo, the World Commission on Global Consciousness and Spirituality, and

The World Address will delve into “where we have come from, where we are, and where we are going as a global body of people.”

Turn On, Tune In, Wake Up

A new plan for a televised State of the World Address intends to use mass media to tackle global problems

Over two centuries ago, when thirteen separate states on the North American continent were struggling to overcome their differences and form a greater union, Federalist and founding father Alexander Hamilton counseled citizens to “think as a nation.” The political and social issues of the day, he felt, could not be addressed appropriately unless America’s colonial residents began to think of themselves as parts of a greater whole, with common interests and a common fate. Fast-forward two and a quarter centuries, and much the same could be said of our time.

In these days of global uncertainty, 193 nations are facing unprecedented challenges, from globalization to global warming, that are no longer containable within their individual borders.

Luckily, today there are a growing number of innovative projects and initiatives designed to encourage people and governments from Bilbao to Budapest to think about themselves as planetary neighbors whose fates are inextricably linked. For example, there is the well-known State of the World Forum founded by Mikhail Gorbachev and Jim Garrison,

the recently convened World Wisdom Council, just to name a few. Global consciousness, it seems, is getting organized. Well, those keeping track can add one more initiative to the list: the World Address Foundation. The brainchild of Stephen Balkam, an American entrepreneur living in London, the foundation’s vision is to provide a global complement to the American president’s annual State of the Union address that will be called the State of the World Address. Imagine Bush or Clinton’s recent State of the Union addresses and then think global—a few hours of carefully presented programming designed to inform and educate the world population on issues that confront us all, directly or indirectly. For example, what do we do about poverty in Africa? Looming water issues? Nuclear proliferation? Middle East terrorism? The spread of flu epidemics? Don’t expect answers, just a forum that can highlight crucial issues and invigorate the creative

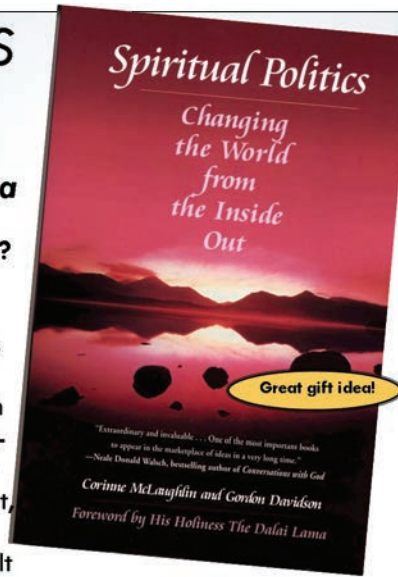
SPIRITUAL POLITICS

By **Corinne McLaughlin**
and **Gordon Davidson**

Foreword by **H.H. The Dalai Lama**

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problem-solving capacity, not just of a nation but of a planet. The current plan is to aim for September 21, 2006, as the date of the first iteration of the World Address. And the foundation, which has already garnered some high-profile supporters, is hoping to enroll several prominent international figures to deliver the speech, which will be televised around the world. They are looking for someone with the stature of "Bill Clinton, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Mary Robinson, or the Dalai Lama," says Balkam.

Inspired by visionaries like Buckminster Fuller and integral philosophies like those of Clare Graves and Ken Wilber, Balkam came up with his idea on the eve of the Iraq War during a long flight to Asia, at that rare moment when "you have read your book, watched a movie, done all of your work, and still have hours left in the flight." He hopes that a few hours of a World Address—delivered by universally trusted faces, broadcast all over the world, and delving into "where we have come from, where we are, and where we are going as a global body of people"—could provide an extraordinary moment for world consciousness to reflect on itself and see the reality of an interconnected society. Perhaps such an event could begin to tap, as he puts it, the "collective wisdom of the world."

Hamilton knew it in the late eighteenth century and Balkam knows it today—the future will be decided largely by how we think about it. The World Address Foundation is one more step toward encouraging us to think not as a tribe, ethnic group, religious orientation, or nation-state, but as an integral global society.

Carter Phipps

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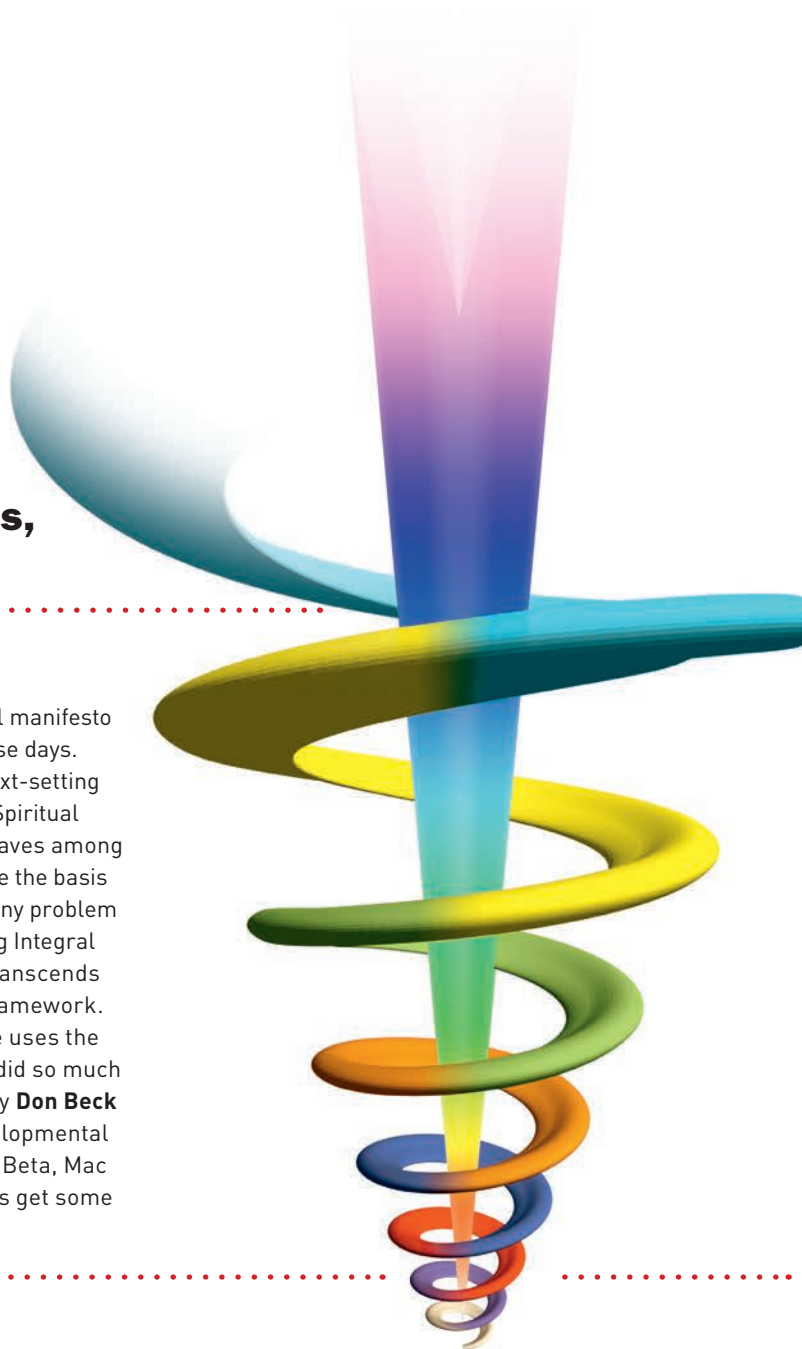
pulse

by Carter Phipps

catching the buzz from global leaders, thinkers, teachers, and mystics

WHAT COLOR IS YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS?

What is Integral spirituality? That question is the title of a spiritual manifesto about the spiritual life circulating around a few select email boxes these days. Authored by Mr. Integral himself, **Ken Wilber**, and prepared as a context-setting essay for this past summer's inaugural gathering of the ISC (Integral Spiritual Center) in Denver, Colorado, *What Is Integral Spirituality?* is making waves among the Integral crowd. While its contents are still under wraps and may be the basis for a future book, *WIE* has learned that Wilber's essay tackles the thorny problem of religion and fundamentalism using his patented and ever-expanding Integral framework. Moreover, he lays out a whole new color scheme that transcends and includes Spiral Dynamics in a comprehensive developmental framework. What's the basis of the scheme? Like the Eastern chakra system, he uses the colors of the rainbow. Of course, don't forget that it was Wilber who did so much to make Spiral Dynamics, and its nifty color-coded system created by **Don Beck** and **Chris Cowan**, the de facto standard for easily remembering developmental stages. So now it's like kilometers and miles all over again, VHS and Beta, Mac and Windows. Am I teal or indigo, amber or blue!? C'mon people, let's get some consensus out there.



Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

STRESS IN THE GREEN ZONE

Indian spiritual teacher Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

has been putting his skills to work in an unusual place—Iraq. His organization, Art of Living,

dispatched a team to Baghdad soon after the initial invasion to help both Iraqis and American soldiers deal with the stress and trauma of a war-

torn country by using meditation and breathing techniques. And they have stayed there, even as safety in Baghdad became . . . well, less safe. Once a student of transcendental meditation master **Maharishi Mahesh Yogi** (better known as the Beatles' guru), Shankar has inherited his teacher's unique talent for making a virtue of simplicity. He teaches easy-to-use, easy-to-learn practices and techniques that immediately impact the psycho-physical system.

And judging by the response, the Art of Living team seems to be having an effect. Some Iraqis have been so impressed that they have made their way to the ashram in India to learn how to teach the methods themselves. And Iraq isn't the only war zone on the guru's list. Teams of Shankar's students also set up shop in Kosovo and Bosnia during the crisis there, and there are plans to send people out to the Sudan as well.



HONKY-TONK MYSTICS

The thirteenth-century Sufi master Rumi has achieved almost universal recognition in this day and age for his mystical and ecstatic poetic verse (with a little help from translators such as Coleman Barks). But lately, this ancient Islamic mystic has been generating some buzz in the most unlikely of genres—southern country/bluegrass music. Yes, thanks to the efforts of Tennessee native Michael Green, author of *The Illuminated Rumi*, and an Appalachian band called The Illumination Band, Rumi's poetry has escaped the printed page and taken flight into the sweet harmonies of a genre more accustomed to breakups and bar fights. Apparently, putting Rumi to music is hardly unknown in his native Middle East, where all-night Rumi revelries have been common for centuries. Nevertheless, it's hard to imagine that anyone would have expected to hear the mandolin and fiddle providing the bed of sound for Middle East mysticism. No one can argue with the result however, as The Illumination Band's latest CD pulls off a sort of minor miracle—bridging the gap between twentieth-century Appalachia and thirteenth-century Turkey. What's their secret? Well, besides being good musicians, we suspect it might have something to do with the band's own mystic Sufi teacher—the extraordinary Sri Lankan master Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (d. 1986).


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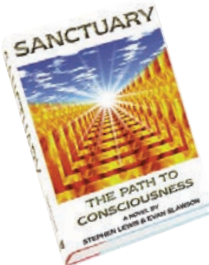
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pulse

COSMIC DREAMS AND BUTTERFLY WINGS



James Gardner, author, complexity theorist, and former state senator, is shopping around a new book proposal whose title couldn't help but catch our eye. Called *Dreams of a Cosmic Community: AI, ET, and the Emerging Mind of the Cosmos*, it will take up where his first foray into physics, *Biocosm*, left off, exploring biology, complexity theory, artificial intelligence, supra-intelligent species, UFOs, the direction of the universe, and the fate and destiny of the cosmos—you know, mundane things like that. Gardner, a practicing lawyer, thinks like a physicist and

argues his points like a seasoned attorney, but thankfully, he writes for the layperson in clear and simple prose as he explores the role of intelligence in shaping not only this planet's future but the future of the whole cosmos. *WIE* has seen an early outline of the book in which Gardner humbly describes his thesis as explaining how "the origin of life and the emergence of intelligence were not meaningless accidents in a hostile, largely lifeless cosmos but at the very heart of the vast machinery of creation, cosmological evolution, and cosmic replication." Now if someone could just convince those Kansas school boards.

EVOLUTION IN DEVELOPMENT

Evolution continues to be a buzzword these days, and not just among Kansas school boards. Recently, thirty or so scientists, activists, scholars, and teachers gathered under the central California sun and spent three days discussing the dynamics of evolution from cultural, biological, and cosmic perspectives. The idea, conceived and executed by Christian minister and "evolutionary evangelist" **Michael Dowd**, was to explore how understanding the nature and direction of evolution is critical for negotiating the twenty-first century. There was no shortage of star power in attendance, including such well-known thinkers as **Brian Swimme, Barbara Marx Hubbard, Duane Elgin, Paul Ray, and Elisabet**

Sahtouris. Participants presented their schemes, ideas, models, maps, and plans for building a more evolved human culture. And the high-powered audience didn't just listen. They argued and critiqued and discussed, sparking some fascinating talks about everything from peak oil to evolutionary directionality to world history to political reform. So what was the end result of the gathering? Hard to say just yet, but Dowd is quietly planning to hold more such events around the country over the next years, with the ultimate goal being the formation of some sort of permanent entity, possibly a think tank. Think Santa Fe Institute with less chaos and complexity, more culture and cosmology.



Michael Dowd

SPIRITUALITY MAKES THE “IT” LIST

Steve Case, former AOL chairman, buys the Wisdom Channel. **Martha Stewart** purchases the once mighty *New Age Journal* (now *Body & Soul*). **Al Gore's** youth-oriented Current TV talks openly about including spiritually focused content, and also hires **Gotham Chopra** (Deepak's son) to be on his staff. Yes, the rush to bring progressive spiritual themes into the mass media is continuing unabated. Need more evidence? The Spiritual Cinema Circle, the spiritual DVD subscription service, has been so successful that it's starting to produce its own movies, like **Neale Donald Walsch's** *Conversations with God*, which began shooting this November. And the Circle has spun off other projects such as the Transformational Book Circle, a sort of Oprah book club for New Agers that distributes books endorsed by popular spiritual teachers like **Deepak Chopra**, **Debbie Ford**, and **Louise Hay**. The club signed up three thousand members in its first few hours. That's right—the first few hours.

Even reality TV is getting spiritual. Last spring, the BBC featured *The Monastery*, a TV special that took five men from varied backgrounds and gave them a forty-day and forty-night spiritual makeover living with monks in a Catholic abbey. The result? Major changes in all five lives, and good ratings to boot.

Or how about *I Married a Princess*? This new reality TV show debuted last spring on Lifetime and features an average Malibu family of seven—except that the mother is the princess of Yugoslavia. The princess and her husband wanted to demonstrate a holistic, spiritually grounded lifestyle for the prime-time audience. Several episodes show the family attending Agape, the eclectic and progressive LA spiritual community formed by **Rev. Michael Beckwith**. Another includes a visit to



Steve Case



Mata Amritanandamayi



Michael Beckwith



Deepak Chopra

see world-renowned Indian teacher **Mata Amritanandamayi** (Amma), one of the most enlightened women alive today. Not exactly something you see every day on cable.

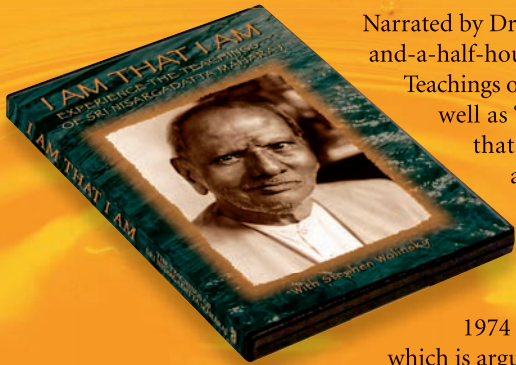
Finally, *WIE* has learned that Amma herself is planning to launch a North American television channel focused on spiritual themes. While the legendary

saint has Oprah-like clout in her native India, it will be interesting to see how her influence translates in the American market. The smart money says don't bet against her.

If you have any information that would be appropriate for Pulse, please send it to pulse@wie.org

I AM THAT I AM

Featuring never-seen-before footage of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj!



Narrated by Dr. Stephen Wolinsky, this two-and-a-half-hour DVD contains The Complete Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, as well as “experiential meditations” that lead the viewer into the I AM, and beyond, into That One Substance from which all phenomena appear to arise. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj remained little known until 1974 when the book *I Am That*, which is arguably the most profound spiritual text of a generation, appeared.

Since Nisargadatta Maharaj's death in 1981, he has become renowned throughout the world. He is considered by many, along with Ramana Maharshi, to be the strongest voice of Advaita Vedanta to appear in the 20th century.

DVD 157 minutes

Including extremely rare footage of a 30-minute Q&A session with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

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In a time considered in Hindu cosmology to be the “Confluence Age,” when the darkest moment in human history begins to be penetrated by an illuminating wisdom, Dadi Janki is like a divine messenger “bringing the first rays of light from the pure and peaceful future world that lies ahead.” At the age of eighty-nine, Dadi Janki, who is the co-administrative head of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, continues to travel tirelessly around the globe imparting her message of hope. She is compelled by the spiritual awakening that occurred nearly seventy years ago in the presence of her teacher, the founder of the Brahma Kumaris, Prajapita Brahma, known with affection and reverence as Brahma Baba. Here, Dadi Janki describes her experience of awakening to this higher consciousness and how it ultimately led her to become one of India’s most venerated female spiritual leaders and a guiding presence for millions worldwide.

Jessica Roemischer

A Vision of Soul Consciousness

Dadi Janki describes how her teacher awakened her to the life Divine

I encountered many gurus when I was young, and my father would advise me to adopt a guru. But I would reply, “No. I want to find God.” I didn’t want to be a follower and sit at somebody’s feet. What is the benefit of that? I wanted my mind to be focused on God.

Now, I knew Brahma Baba as a family friend before his transformation, and his life had been based on high principles of great honesty. He had a jewelry business in Calcutta that was well known, but he worked only a few hours each day. In the morning hours, he would go to the parks and spend time contemplating God. He had a great

thirst to know God. Who is God? Where is He? After his transformation—after he’d had a series of visions—I could see that there was a new light in him. It was as if there was a current flowing from him that was reaching us, but he never set himself up as a guru. He was a mother and a father. He would sit with us as a parent would sit with his children; he was very friendly. He did whatever needed to be done in the physical plane without a trace of ego, and he would never accept service from us as most gurus would.

We saw that he was continually in communication with the Supreme, and

as a result, he had so much energy that he would serve all of us, and many others, and never tire. He never slept. At eleven o’clock at night, I’d go to his room and I’d say, “Baba, it is time for rest.” And he’d say, “No child. As much as I can stay awake, it is good.” He would teach us how to sleep in God’s remembrance. At two AM he’d still be awake. He would say, “The world is crying, so how can I sleep?” At four o’clock in the morning, he would be lying awake and he would say, “I was thinking of children like you who can wake up the world so that the world can change. God wants children who

We saw that he was continually in communication with the Supreme, and as a result, he had so much energy that he would serve all of us, and many others . . .

can remove sorrow from the souls of those who are suffering.” And I had this determined thought: “I want to be a worthy child and give the fruit and substance to others that Baba is giving me.”

After I decided that I wanted to surrender to this calling, there was an amazing experience with Brahma

Brahma Baba
 Founder of the Brahma Kumaris

Baba in which the inner eye opened up, and I was able to see myself and know who I am. And I could see that Brahma Baba had a direct link with God. It was as if his physical form was not physical. There was light radiating from his forehead. It was as if he was not the one speaking, but rather as if he was an instrument for the Divine to speak through. Although I had studied the Gita and the scriptures, I hadn't been able to understand them. But now I understood. He was enabling us to have a direct connection to God. He was giving us a vision of soul consciousness and reminding us that we belong to Him—that I belong to God and God belongs to me.

So when Brahma Baba looked at me, he transmitted the awareness of God's remembrance—that I, the soul, am totally free from the consciousness of the body, detached from the body. I am separate from my relatives, my

mother and father. The whole physical world is quite separate, and I, the soul, belong to God. It was such a deep transformation.

When a person physically dies, the whole world dies for that person, and that was what it was like. Nothing was the same. It was as if the soul became totally separate from the body. I didn't belong to this world and nothing here belonged to me. When a person tries to achieve that kind of detachment, it's usually quite difficult, but in this case it happened in such a powerful and natural way. There was the awareness that all physical things and all physical relationships are temporary because they belong to the world of matter. They have a finite limit to them. So I'm not attached to my body. I'm not afraid of death because I know I'll die in God's remembrance. Why should I be afraid? I, the soul, am eternal.

So from Baba's words, we received

great understanding. And through his eyes we could feel the power of peace. He had taken so much from God that he was able to be an instrument of that peace, which was so powerful that it cleansed the self. Some years later, as Brahma Baba was sharing a vision of soul consciousness, I suddenly saw God as a being of light. And I saw myself traveling around the world so that the world could see that this is God, this being of light, and see how beautiful God is. Of course, at that time, I had no idea that I would travel abroad, that I'd be circling the globe so often. It was just a deep motivation to want the world to see God and be able to experience that level of consciousness, the consciousness of the One who removes our sorrow. ■



Watch our online video: **Dadi Janki** at
the Parliament of the World's Religions
www.wie.org/dadi

voices from the edge

A New Axial

Karen Armstrong
on the History—and the Future—of God

An interview by Jessica Roemischer

Shortly following the terrorist attacks in Britain last July, I sat with world-renowned theologian Karen Armstrong in her historic London home. As we spoke about the spiritual challenges of our time and why it behooves us to learn from religious history, police sirens blared in the background, a reminder of the violent and unstable conditions we face as a human species at the outset of the third millennium.

Driven from a young age by a thirst for the spiritual life, Armstrong entered a convent at seventeen and left seven years later, disillusioned by the traditional structures and mores that, despite her passion for the divine, simply could not bring her spiritual yearning to fruition. In the nearly four decades since then, she has turned that passion into a prolific investigation into the essence and evolution of the great traditions. Her best-selling book, *A History of God*, now published in more than thirty languages, is a compelling retrospective of religious history. In it, she provocatively and exhaustively illustrates how humans have had to *redefine* the sacred at critical historical junctures in order to meet new spiritual needs created by changing cultural conditions and large-scale crises.

As we spoke together in an atmosphere permeated by disquiet and uncertainty, Armstrong pointed me back to the dawn of the great religious traditions and simultaneously brought my attention to the present—a time when once again, she believes, we will need to redefine the notion of the sacred so it can become relevant and enter our lives anew.

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT: *In your book A History of God, you take us through the emergence of the world's religious traditions, which occurred during what is known as the Axial Age—a period you feel is particularly relevant to our own time. To begin with, why is this historic era called the Axial Age?*

KAREN ARMSTRONG: The period 800–200 BCE has been termed the Axial Age because it proved pivotal to humanity. Society had grown much more aggressive. Iron had been discovered, and this was the beginning of the Iron Age. Better weapons had been invented, and while those weapons look puny compared to what we're dealing with now, it was still a shock.

The first Axial Age also occurred at a time when individualism was just beginning. As a result of urbanization and a new market economy, people were no longer living on lonely hilltops but in a thriving, aggressive, commercial economy. Power was shifting from king and priest, palace and temple to the marketplace. Inequality and exploitation became more apparent as the pace of change accelerated in the cities and people began to realize that their own behavior could affect the fate of future generations.

So the Axial Age marks the beginning of humanity as we now know it. During this period, men and women became conscious of their existence, their own nature, and their limitations in an unprecedented way. In the Axial Age countries, a

Age



I feel that we are—all of us—at one of those junctions in history when we are holding ourselves, our past, our future, and our integrity in the palms of our own hands.

few men sensed fresh possibilities and broke away from the old traditions. People who participated in this great transformation were convinced that they were on the brink of a new era and that nothing would ever be the same. They sought change in the deepest reaches of their beings, looked for greater inwardness in their spiritual lives, and tried to become one with a transcendent reality. After this pivotal era, it was felt that only by reaching beyond their limits could human beings become most fully themselves.

WIE: *Can you further describe the ways in which this “great transformation” manifested?*

ARMSTRONG: Most significantly, it is the time when all the great world religions came into being. And in every single case, the spiritualities that emerged during the Axial Age—Taoism and Confucianism in China, monotheism in Israel, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism in India, and Greek rationalism in Europe—began with a recoil from violence, with looking into the heart to find the sources of violence in the human psyche. The conviction that the world was awry was fundamental to these spiritualities. One of the things that is very striking is that all the great sages were living in a time like our own—a time full of fear, violence, and horror. Their experience of utter impotence in a cruel world impelled them to seek the highest goals and an absolute reality in the depths of their beings.

For example, the China of Confucius and Lao-tzu was engaged for centuries in one war after another. The whole of the very ancient civilization of China was becoming more aggressive. And you have that understanding very strongly in Confucius as he looks out on the world and laments loudly while, at the same time, he tries to rebuild it by recrafting the old rituals in a way that brings forward their compassionate and altruistic potential. That essential dynamic of compassion is summed up in the Golden Rule, which was first enunciated by Confucius around 500 BCE: “Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you.”

On the Indian subcontinent at this time, there was a major economic and political turnaround. Suddenly powerful kingdoms and empires were being created, and they relied on force. People all over India were equating horror with the new violence in their society and in the marketplace, where merchants were preying aggressively upon one another. Many of their philosophies developed a doctrine of nonviolence as a way to counter violence by refusing any form of it whatsoever.

The fifth century was terrifying in Greece as well. While it was a time of great artistic creativity, it was also a time of huge violence. The Greeks were, in many respects, a terrible people, and yet every year in Athens they would stage the political events of that year in their great tragedies. These were written as ways of looking at the tragic implications of what was going on in their midst, of calling everything into question and really plumbing

the human experience of suffering. So violence and suffering seem to be a *sine qua non* of a spiritual quantum leap forward.

WIE: *Why do you believe it's so important for us to reflect upon the traditional religions and the age in which they emerged?*

ARMSTRONG: Today we are amid a second Axial Age and are undergoing a period of transition similar to that of the first Axial Age. Its roots lie in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the modern era, when the people of Western Europe began to evolve a different type of society. Since that time, Western civilization has transformed the world. The economic changes of the last four hundred years have been accompanied by immense social, political, and intellectual revolutions, with the development of an entirely different scientific and rational concept of the nature of truth. But despite the cult of rationality, modern history has been punctuated by witch hunts and world wars which have been explosions of unreason.

So, I feel that we are—all of us—at one of those junctions in history when we are holding ourselves, our past, our future, and our integrity in the palms of our own hands. This is a moment when, if we allow that integrity to fall out, we might never recover it in the same way. Once again, a radical change has become necessary.

WIE: *How do you see us responding to our own pivotal moment in history?*

ARMSTRONG: All over the world, people are struggling with these new conditions and have been forced to reassess their religious traditions, which were designed for a very different type of society. They are finding that the old forms of faith no longer work for them; they cannot provide the enlightenment and consolation that human beings seem to need. As a result, men and women are trying to find new ways of being religious. Like the reformers and prophets of the first Axial Age, they are attempting to build upon the insights of the past in a way that will take human beings forward into the new world they have created for themselves.

We have, from the very beginning of our existence as a species, created works of art and created religions to give us the sense that, against all the aggressive and spirited evidence to the contrary, life really does have some ultimate meaning, value, and sacredness. And the notion of the sacred has a history, since it has always meant something slightly different to different groups of people at various points in time. If we look at our three major monotheistic religions, it becomes clear that there is no objective “God”; each generation has to create the image of God that works for them. When one conception of God has ceased to have meaning or relevance, it has been dis-

carded and replaced by a new theology. Had the notion of God not had this flexibility, it would not have survived.

In that context, atheism takes on a different meaning. Atheism is often a transitional state: Jews, Christians, and Muslims were all called atheists by their pagan contemporaries because they had adopted a revolutionary notion of divinity and transcendence. The people who have been dubbed atheists over the years have always denied a *particular* conception of the divine. But is the God who is rejected by atheists today the God of the patriarchs, the God of the prophets, the God of the philosophers, the God of the mystics, or the God of the eighteenth-century deists? All these deities have been venerated, but they are very different from one another. Perhaps modern atheism is a similar denial of a God that is no longer adequate to the problems of our time.

WIE: *So, we are again at a point when religion and the notion of God, or the sacred, may need to be redefined.*

ARMSTRONG: Religion is highly pragmatic, despite its otherworldliness. It should not only transform us, but it should also transform the world. Religion *should* make a difference. And as soon as it ceases to be effective, it will be changed. So we should be working now to make our religion and our faith effective in this lost, suffering, and terrifying world. But first, before we can make a proper difference, we must transform ourselves. There's a very good verse in the Qur'an where God says, “Therein God will not change the state of the people unless they change the state of their own selves.” And that's what we must do now.

WIE: *In what way do you see this occurring?*

ARMSTRONG: At this moment in history, I believe that we need a new spiritual revolution. We need a new faith. Now, you can say, “Look, give us a break. This is hardly the time to start a new spiritual revolution. At this juncture, we've got war. We've got the prospect of terrorism. The economy is bad. Let's have a bit of peace and quiet so that we can go up a mountain, collect ourselves, and then begin this spiritual effort.” But suffering, fear, violence, and despair are the prime conditions for such a renewal.

I think the sages and prophets of the first Axial Age knew very well about our destructive potentials. What was happening in their own society was a tremendous shock to them. They had to look into their own hearts, discover what gave them pain, and then rigorously refrain from inflicting this suffering upon other people. In order to counter aggression, they taught their followers to cultivate the habit of sympathy for all living things. They discovered that greed and selfishness were the cause of our personal misery and that egotism imprisoned us in an inferior

version of ourselves and impeded our enlightenment.

Our present Axial Age is characterized by globalization. We live in one world, and we have to learn to live with difference, at home and abroad. We have to see that we have very big brains and very puny bodies, and because of our big brains, we've been able to create a technology that compensates for our small size. But we don't seem to have the ability to keep our aggression in check. Unfortunately, as our technological expertise advances, our spiritual wisdom isn't growing up alongside it. Yet that's what we need now in this world that, as we're speaking, is falling apart. We've seen the bombs here in London, on 9/11, in Auschwitz, in Bosnia. We have lost all sense of the sacredness of human life. And that has to be cultivated.

We can't think "God" without thinking "human" now. We can't think "human" without thinking "God." Because the sacred is not just something tacked on to our natural existence. It's no longer something *out there*. The sacred must be that to which we all aspire. It must become, in the best possible sense, deeply *natural* to us. It should fulfill our being so that we can all, as the Greek Orthodox said, be like Jesus even in this life, if we live right, in this certain way.

During the first Axial Age, the great sages *worked* at this. Everyone was prepared to be creative and spend as much time on this as people spend today on discovering a new computer. And that requires discipline. But we've lost the sense that spirituality is hard work. It is often turned into a commodity to make us feel good. But it isn't just wandering lonely as a cloud and hoping you'll see a clump of daffodils to enthuse about. I believe the Dalai Lama was reduced to tears when an American audience asked him how they could get instant enlightenment. He hadn't realized things were *that* bad. So we have to make a constant effort of imagination, which is the great religious faculty. As Sartre says, "The imagination is the ability to see what is not present, what is hidden." We must exercise this faculty fully, whereby we apprehend, in a new way, the inscrutable and ever-elusive divine. ■

Karen Armstrong has written several books on religion and culture, including the best-selling *A History of God* and *The Battle for God*, as well as *Islam: A Short History* and *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*. She is currently working on a new book on the Axial Age. Armstrong teaches at Leo Baeck College for the Study of Judaism in London.



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voices from the edge

The Evolution of

Rabbi Marc Gafni
on a New Spiritual Vision for Our Time

The world today is filled with suffering of the most infinite and painful kind. Anyone who has fought in or been exposed to war or who has witnessed a bus full of children explode—a tragically familiar scene in my part of the world—finds it difficult to embrace a theological perspective, whether it's from the Eastern or Western traditions, Meister Eckhart or the Kabbalah or J. Krishnamurti. Because in the face of that kind of suffering, what do you do? How do you meditate and embrace a ground of being that is divine in a world of radical suffering? How do you live in a world where supposedly, God is king, and yet real kingship or stewardship seems to be lacking in the most profound way possible? In a world of evil and suffering, how do you begin to talk about love and healing and transformation? *That* is the question.

Classical theology arose in order to answer that question. And the core motivating force in the formation of the great religions was love for one's neighbor—a love and magnanimity that were transmitted at the greatest possible depth to the largest number of people. This required the development of religious systems whereby the great revelations of spirit were translated into *practice* and conveyed to wider and wider audiences. These systems included law, ceremony, and ritual, and there were many versions of them. The development of spiritual practices also grew out of the desire to transmit these experiences and the religious values borne from them to *future* generations, to guarantee an ongoing religiosity in society at large.

But if that wholly positive intention was the entire story, the old religions in their original forms might never have fallen into their well-deserved contemporary disrepute. Over time, religion transgressed its bounds and made two major mistakes. First, it generated the popular understanding that nonbelievers were damned to eternal perdition. St. Augustine spoke to this in all religions in his classic formulation, “There is no Redemption outside of the church.” Thus religion often degenerated into chauvinism and triumphalism, in which murder and untold cruelty were perpetrated in the name of God. It is not insignificant that enlightenment philosopher Voltaire's battle cry against religion was “remember the cruelties.”

Second, amid the untold suffering experienced by those of medieval Europe, classical religion could no longer provide true meaning and succor to a plague-stricken population. And yet, in spite of that, religion continued to make claims of knowledge, authority, power, and dogma. It insisted on asserting its relatively arbitrary authority over what was good or evil, proper or improper in all fields of human endeavor, including government, science, the healing arts, economics, and moral thought, ultimately fettering each of these arenas and impeding human progress.

For these reasons, a powerful and correct critique of the classical forms of religion appeared in Western civilization in modernity and then in postmodernity. As we can see, however, the results of that critique have been both positive and nega-

Divinity

Spirituality of the “New Age” variety is often focused on spiritual experiences, few of which make demands on the very essence of the human soul or the way life is actually lived in the world.



tive in their ramifications. One expression of that critique was the shift of authority to individual autonomy and to the democratic stage. These were classically understood as a move away from the authority structures of religion. Scientific rationalism replaced premodern dogma, freeing human inquiry, innovation, and agency.

But I will focus here on what is, for many of us today, the most significant aspect of the move away from classical religion. The reaction against religious tradition that began with modernity has emerged as a contemporary preference for a loosely defined and more loosely practiced spirituality—one that is to a considerable extent defining the spiritual landscape of our time.

Our postmodern culture is characterized by an unprecedented individualism, narcissism, and materialism—autonomy gone awry. In this cultural climate, spirituality of the “New Age” variety has emerged as being long on vision but short on commitment, depth, and rigor. This kind of spirituality is often primarily focused on spiritual experiences, few of which make demands on the very essence of the human soul or the way life is actually lived in the world. There is no sense of what Hebrew wisdom would call *mitzvah*. *Mitzvah*, which literally means commandment and is mistakenly translated as good deed, speaks to the sense that something *must be done*. But in much of contemporary spirituality, personal preference replaces obligation. Indeed, this preference is but a reflection

of the underlying narcissism that lies at the heart of both the modern and postmodern quests for meaning. Instead of autonomy being an internal source of authority, freedom has come to mean free from the core obligation to *grow*; free to ignore the call of spirit to committed and consistent *action*.

The essential imperative to clear and decisive action in this moment often goes unheard in the din of postmodernity. It is blocked by the deafening deadness of a society whose true God is comfort and not pleasure. In fact, the definition of modern spiritual decadence is the linguistic assumption that the opposite of pain is pleasure. But the opposite of pain is not pleasure, but *comfort*, which is to avoid pain at all costs. If my goal is *truly* pleasure—the pleasure of spirit, which is growth—then I will be willing to engage the pain of committed service.

Hence modern spiritual seekers anesthetized by the comfort of their pallid “spiritual search” remain at their depths comfortably numb. And in a world gone awry and in desperate need of our help, postmodern spirituality has become a sophisticated form of leisure activity and escape, another variety of the many therapies we apply in the worship at the altar of ourselves.

As we can see, neither New Age spirituality nor the old religious orthodoxies have within them the power to heal our souls and our planet. And presently, they can both function to keep us from experiencing ourselves as partners in the healing of the world—a globalized, superconnected world where

we can no longer claim emotional ignorance. A world where evil and suffering demarcate our reality.

So I want to put forth a different vision of how to manifest love and healing and transformation in this world—a new spiritual vision that emerges from the depths of Hebrew mysticism. One of the core revelations of the great empirical researchers of human development over the past hundred years has been the validation of perhaps the most important single teaching of classic Renaissance Kabbalah—the understanding that Spirit is not static but rather that it develops; it evolves stage by stage. And each stage adopts the great truths of the prior stage while discarding its dross, as it reaches for the next and higher level of Spirit’s unfolding.

Neither New Age spirituality nor the old religious orthodoxies have within them the power to heal our souls and our planet.

The Zohar* says that we are God’s name—we’re God’s verbs, we’re God’s adjectives, we’re even God’s dangling modifiers. We’re the language of the divine in the world, and in that way, we become the voice of the *meshiach*—the messiah. Anything less than the realization of that is called, in the inner mystical tradition, heresy. The core liberation teaching of Kabbalah is that to be a heretic is to believe that *God does not need me*, that I am not required to participate in the *evolution* of God. But enlightenment means we *participate* in divinity; we don’t just submit to it by responding to the evil and suffering in the world with a traditional theology or a theodicy. The ultimate response to the suffering of the world is, like that of the Hebrew mystic, to cry in protest and to let that protest translate into *action*. I call this *nondual humanism*, which means that I participate in God’s evolving self, *now*.

As the great nineteenth-century Hasidic master Nachman of Bratzlav implied, the most important thing in the world is to

*Widely considered the most important work of Kabbalah, or Jewish mysticism.

be willing to give up who you are for who you might become. He calls this process the giving up of *pnimi*, which literally means “what is within.” For Nachman, that means the old, familiar thing that comforts even when it no longer serves—and that can include our spirituality and religion, and even the very core way we understand our relationship to the divine ground of being.

In fact, we are now consciously responsible for the very *evolution* of divinity so that it becomes relevant for our time. Thus we are called on to reach for *makkif*—that which is beyond us, that which we can only reach if we are willing to take a leap into the abyss. This is what Abraham was called to do—to give up all his yesterdays and today’s for an unknown tomorrow.

What we are talking about is much more than the evolution of man. The great privilege of being human is that we can participate in the evolution and healing of God. We participate in the yearning force of being, experiencing the interconnectivity of the all and the all—the fullness of presence and interiority. And that means to take up one’s role as an evolved agent co-creating with God in the transformation of the planet. The evolution of the human spirit is

what catalyzes the evolution of God, of divine consciousness. We are God’s healers. In the words of Nikos Kazantzakis, *We are the saviors of God*. And when God and man meet in an evolutionary embrace, redemption is achieved. ■

Rabbi Marc Gafni is the leader of Bayit Chadash, an international movement for Integral Judaism, and also holds the Chair of Judaism and Kabbalah at the Integral Institute. He is the author of *Soul Prints* and *The Mystery of Love*.



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the guru & the pandit

Laying the Tracks for a

Ken Wilber & Andrew Cohen in dialogue



KEN WILBER: PANDIT. *A scholar who is deeply proficient and immersed in spiritual wisdom. Self-described “defender of the dharma; intellectual samurai.”* Hailed as “the Einstein of consciousness,” Wilber is one of the most highly regarded philosophers alive today, and his work offers a comprehensive and original synthesis of the world’s great psychological, philosophical, and spiritual traditions. Author of numerous books, including *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* and *A Brief History of Everything*, Wilber is the founder of Integral Institute and a regular contributor to *WIE*.



ANDREW COHEN: GURU. *Evolutionary thinker and spiritual pathfinder. Self-described “idealist with revolutionary inclinations.”* Cohen, founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, is a spiritual teacher and author widely recognized as a defining voice in the emerging field of evolutionary spirituality. Over the last decade in the pages of *WIE*, Cohen has brought together leading thinkers from East and West—mystics and materialists, philosophers and psychologists—to explore the significance of a new spirituality for the new millennium. His books include *Embracing Heaven & Earth* and *Living Enlightenment*.

Moving Train

Dialogue XI

Revelation, Right View, and the Challenge of Conscious Evolution

What creates authentic—and sustained—transformation in human beings? In their eleventh dialogue, Wilber and Cohen pursue this elusive and complex question from the depths of mystical experience through the frameworks of developmental theory to the creative frontier, where temporary glimpses of higher potential become the permanent contours of a new stage in human evolution.

When I'm teaching, I bend over backwards to empower people with a perspective that ideally will enable them to **sustain transformation beyond the experience of higher states.**

andrew cohen

ANDREW COHEN: When speaking about enlightenment, or the highest stages of human development, which you would call third tier, it's become absolutely clear to me that until one becomes *firmly established* at those higher levels oneself, access to them seems to be almost always dependent upon the experience of higher states of consciousness. What's often frustrating for me as a teacher is that it seems to be very difficult for most people to sustain the perspective that reveals itself during the experience of those higher states. We've spoken about this together many times, and it continues to be a ceaseless inquiry for me: What is the relationship between temporary states of consciousness and permanent stages of development, and what are the most effective ways to work with individuals to help them actually evolve?

For example, I often find that when I lead retreats, something miraculous occurs that has nothing to do with anyone making any effort. Suddenly we find ourselves swimming in a powerful fourth-dimension state that envelops us all *simply because we showed up for this event*. What happens in that supercharged atmosphere of awakened consciousness is that instantaneously, many individuals take quite a leap. They have a sustained experience of being awake to what you would call a causal level of depth, in an open-eyed nondual context, for many days at a time. Without making any effort, they get a taste of heaven. But I always insist that heaven is not

enough. So once I get them there, I ask them to begin to think about their own humanity and the meaning of life *in the context of the living depth that they have discovered*. I have found that this kind of inquiry reveals a potential for conscious evolution like nothing else. Indeed, looking into the reality of the human experience from a higher state of consciousness dramatically deepens one's conviction in the possibility of a truly radical transformation. Of course, what the individual needs to do then is to use an important event like that as a source of inspiration. They need to begin to make the noble effort to see directly how conditioned and unconscious they usually are. Under their own steam, they need to face how profound is their own *lack* of freedom.

KEN WILBER: As always! And as they do that work, all their junk and all the shadow stuff comes up. But you know, the radiant graceful immersion in that causal, or nondual, dimension is something you can't get for effort or money. It's something that happens only in very rare circumstances; in this particular instance, it is a gift of *satsang* [audience with a guru]. The way it works is that there are these ever-present states, or dimensions, that we're just not plugged in to most of the time. We can plug in to them sometimes by grace, sometimes by skillful means, sometimes by *sadhana* [spiritual practice] and sometimes by *satsang*—whichever way we do it, these dimensions are right there, and when we relax into them or open to them or when they're energized in some sense,

they just come pouring through in a certain radiant stillness. And of course, our development through stages tends to get accelerated in that atmosphere. But then we've still got to go back and do the goddamn work. And that's where you lose people, isn't it?

COHEN: Exactly. Because when it comes down to it, who really wants to change *that* much? That's precisely why, more and more, when I'm teaching, I bend over backwards to empower people with a *perspective* that ideally will enable them to sustain transformation beyond the experience of higher states. What that means, specifically, is that I strive to help people to gain a very clear understanding of the different dimensions of their own self in the context of an enlightened top-down, or third-tier, perspective. I want people, first of all, to have their own experiential recognition of the primordial emptiness that is the Ground of Being, the Self Absolute beyond time. Then secondly, I want them to experience what I call the authentic self, which is the evolutionary impulse, the creative spark behind the cosmos, becoming conscious of itself in the awakening human. Thirdly, and maybe most important of all, I want them to have the rare experience of being able to see the ego, or separate self-sense, from a truly *objective* vantage point. So my retreats are basically designed to expose people to these different dimensions of their own selves and to constantly bring them back to seeing the distinctions between them *while they're in an expanded state of consciousness*.

It's very powerful to see people who are completely new to the territory suddenly begin to speak with authority and conviction about these quite profound distinctions, based on their very own experience. Of course, they usually can't hold it on their own, but my job is to give them the direct experience of the territory and the perspective to understand what it means, so that they can begin to see for themselves what the Path is.

THE X-FACTOR

WILBER: It's just so fascinating. The ground of all being, the ground of experience, isn't itself an experience—you just sort of get plunged into a recognition of its already-full nature. But I'm constantly struck by what happens when people come out of

that state and lose it. As I've said before, what I want to do at some point is some really good psychometric research—set up a whole battery of tests before, during, and after a retreat and see who holds it and who doesn't. The scientist in me is just curious as hell to do that.

COHEN: The thing is, what you're talking about is what I would call the mysterious x-factor in human transformation. There's a part of this process that is always completely unpredictable—perhaps it has to do with karmic tendencies and other strange variables that are impossible to understand, things we just can't explain based on what we can see occurring in a single lifetime.

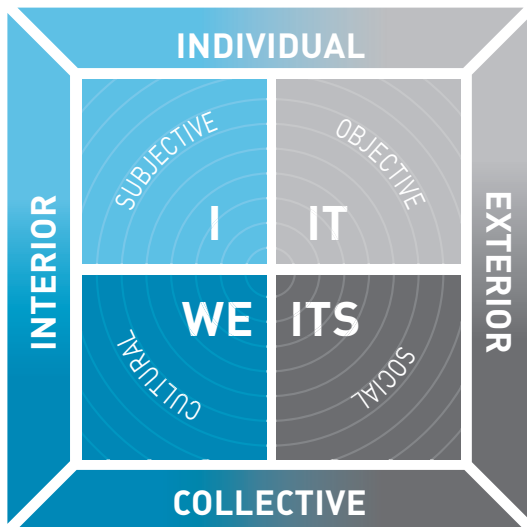
WILBER: Some people say that the universe contains "dark matter," and

who the heck knows what is going on down there . . . Maybe that's what you're working against!

COHEN: Sometimes it sure feels that way! Believe me, if I could only identify this x-factor, I would give everything that I own . . .

WILBER: I'm with you. I mean, this is the only thing that we have been talking about—in a sense we've been having this conversation for almost ten years now. Our dialogues are just variations on a theme, a single question: "If there is only God, how come people don't get it?" However you want to phrase it, that's the one discussion we've been having—variations on this same mono-theme of all mono-themes.

COHEN: With my own students, the real sticking point is that I want them to take responsibility, *for the highest reasons,*



The Four Quadrants

In Ken Wilber's integral philosophy, our multidimensional Kosmos consists entirely of sentient beings, or "holons," spanning atoms to amoebas to astronauts. All holons can be perceived from at least four fundamental perspectives. In the Four Quadrants diagram, the Upper Left quadrant represents an individual holon viewed from the interior (as an "I," or subjective mind), and the Upper Right represents the view of that holon from the exterior (as an "It," or objective body). Because no holon exists in isolation, the Lower Left quadrant represents the view from within a collective of holons (as a "We," or intersubjective culture), and the Lower Right represents a collective viewed from the outside (as an "Its," or interobjective society). All four dimensions of this matrix, Wilber believes, are essential components of any truly integral pursuit.

The authentic self feels like being on a highway that is vibrating, constantly moving forward, that keeps calling us to itself, “You have to get on this, get with this, get into this, this is it . . .”

andrew cohen

for that which they have already experienced. That’s where all the reticence and ambivalence and the profound and intense resistance usually comes to the surface. A lot of people want to have higher-state experiences—they want to taste the ecstasy of eternity and the promise of the future in their own being. But I always say, “Now you have to *own* the implications of what it means to taste eternity, and you have to own the implications of what it means to *become* the evolutionary impulse as yourself, beyond ego.” And that’s when a lot of people start to backpedal—suddenly they seem to lose their memories; they start stuttering; they forget how they ended up in such a predicament.

WILBER: (Laughs) Indeed!

COHEN: The ego is always profoundly ambivalent about truly evolving—unless it thinks it can be king or queen of the universe!

WILBER: Oh man, God bless the ego. We’d both be out of a job without it!

COHEN: (Laughs) It can be the toughest job in the world, though. There are individual and collective dimensions of ego, and in the work I’m doing, I’m digging into these structures in a way that includes but always transcends the individual. And that definitely makes it a lot more challenging for the individuals involved—including myself.

WILBER: But what an extraordinary adventure to be on, sort of riding right at the edge of this process, and watching it all unfold. It’s a fascinating view, to put it mildly.

RIGHT VIEW

WILBER: I’m constantly reminded again and again of something you said in one of our recent dialogues, and I quote you on this all the time: that the interpretation of the spiritual experience is more important than the experience itself.

COHEN: Absolutely.

WILBER: It’s how you hold it, how you own it. Getting dunked in it is easy, but now let me see you carry it, and let me see you carry it for the right reasons.

COHEN: That’s why these days, I give far more importance to the clear and conscious cultivation of the vast perspective of the enlightened mind. And while, as I said before, the experience of higher states can reveal that perspective, I have also found it works the other way around. Interestingly enough, grasping the big picture can actually be a catalyst for the experience of higher states. In this way, the perspective itself becomes the vehicle that helps people’s minds expand and hearts open rather than any particular experience.

WILBER: I don’t want to draw too many parallels to the traditions, because Spirit moves on, but even in Dzogchen there’s the “View” or “Right View,” and they tell us that when you get Right View, it helps you get emptiness—ever-present, nondual, unborn, radical emptiness. And the View is just as important as that experience.

COHEN: Indeed—the grasping of new perspectives can generate a real and thrilling experience of freedom. This

is something I’ve often found reading your work. Sometimes, when you refer to the Four Quadrants [see diagram], for example, you say they’re “just a map,” but for this reason I feel they’re much more than that.

WILBER: I don’t mean it that way, but please go ahead—I want to hear.

COHEN: Well, for example, I’ve had several powerful insights just recognizing how deeply embedded I and most of us are in a materialistic, dualistic, Cartesian worldview, without even being aware of it. When one gets glimpses of the multidimensional or, in your words, *tetra*-integrated cosmos—that everything, as *one*, is emerging *simultaneously* in all four quadrants, it’s nothing less than enlightening, which means that it can truly shatter a dualistic worldview.

WILBER: Yes, I agree. It deepens spiritual realization. And thank you for saying that, because I really do think that that framework does reach right up into the unmanifest. And when you come out of the unmanifest, having an integral framework deepens your spiritual realization. It doesn’t matter who we are, we are brought up in a world where we are deeply conditioned from day one in what you call a Cartesian worldview, the whole subject-object mess, and people get one quadrant and not the others. So the fact of the matter is that there are these four dimensions—and I always say *at least four*, because there could be *multiple* dimensions . . . but there are at least these four fundamental ones. And what happens is that even as you mentally walk through them,

*I use a similar metaphor: that you're riding a locomotive and **laying down railroad tracks at the same time.**
The authentic self railroad!*

ken wilber



like you say, it digs into dualistic ruts that you didn't know were there.

COHEN: Oh, absolutely.

WILBER: And it liberates, it *causes* satori, it *causes* spiritual realization.

COHEN: Without a doubt, because the way we think about our experience, consciously and unconsciously, determines everything. And it's interesting how this understanding and emphasis has naturally emerged as part of my own evolution.

WILBER: I agree—and frankly, it's been part of my own evolution too. I've tended to underplay both the role of an interpretative framework and the role of View. People tend to assume that I came at it the other way; that because I had written so much on this framework, I thought the framework was superimportant to realization. But I didn't. I'm basically an old Zen person, and I was taught to sit manifesting Buddha mind as *shikantaza* [a form of meditation meaning “just sitting”], and anything resembling concepts was just bad, bad, bad, and simply not the way it's done. So I came to this understanding myself quite late, in terms of even theoretically agreeing with it, let alone in my own particular spiritual practice. I earned this the hard way, in both the mental and supramental dimensions of my own realization, even in my own writing. I think that as you grow as a teacher, whether it's a guru teacher or a pandit teacher, it really is a matter of deepening the understanding of the central importance of View.

COHEN: Absolutely. With my own students, I feel this is the crux of the

matter, because when people hold the View, they are going to be my *partners*, not my followers.

PARTNERSHIP BEYOND EGO

COHEN: You know, despite the post-modern self's passionate identification with being an autonomous individual, most people don't want to be *truly* autonomous and independent—especially in a supercharged context like the one that I create, where I really do want, in my own crazy way, to actually catalyze a new level of development.

WILBER: And they don't want to hold partnership with you in that?

COHEN: Well, of course, they *want* to, otherwise they wouldn't be here, but the question is, to what degree?

WILBER: What strikes me as interesting is what you said about partnership—partnership in the true View, on the other side of ego. In order to go into this, I want to speak more about what I really mean by the four quadrants, because you're right, they are not just some objective map that you look at. The system I've developed, which I call “integral post-metaphysics,” is based on the understanding that every occasion is without dimensions; it simply arises moment to moment, and yet it *manifests* itself. And when it does so, it simultaneously possesses an inside and an outside as well as an individual and a collective dimension. Taken together, this gives us the inside and the outside of the individual and the collective. You have to draw a boundary someplace, and then you've got an inside and an outside, and as soon as you have that, you have a singular and

a plural, an I and a we. That's the four quadrants, and each moment unfolds in those dimensions. Does that make sense?

COHEN: Absolutely.

WILBER: And that's the beautiful part, that all these dimensions are the manifestation of the ever-present is-ness, and what the quadrants are is just a reminder that in the manifest world, we must always take those dimensions into account because they are there. But the paper on which the quadrants are written is the unconditional, the unborn. What it really means in very experiential terms is that moment to moment there is this ever-present is-ness, and yet as soon as you feel it, as soon as you locate yourself *in it*, there's an *I*.

COHEN: Yes. The minute you locate yourself, the whole world appears.

WILBER: Exactly. As soon as there is an *I*, there is an *it* or an object, and then there's a *we*; there is some resonance with some other subjectivity someplace. For example, you and I are resonating right now; we are each an *I* and we are forming a *we*, because we have some mutual understanding, and the telephone is an *it*. So there's an *I*, a *we*, and an *it*. Now what happens when you're working with evolutionary enlightenment—or probably with any spiritual practice, but certainly when you are on the leading edge like you are—is that when you are plunging people into a causal, or nondual, open-eyes, ever-present, non-effort state, then, as you were saying, their *authentic self* speaks. In other words, an *I* arises that is an authentic self. And it should arise in a community of

The way that we think about our experience, consciously and unconsciously, determines everything.

andrew cohen

The leading-edge stage today would be a self that goes beyond ego and beyond individuality. But maybe a billion years from now, that will be the very thing that the evolutionary pioneers are trying to overcome. Today's heaven is tomorrow's hell—that's evolution.

ken wilber

other authentic selves. As soon as you emerge from that nondual state and locate yourself as a separate entity, you should be resonating with other selves that are at that same level. If not, you basically end up having to pull people up. That is what the guru does. The guru manifests as an *I* that is going to form a *we* with students and help pull their *I* up to that same level. That's the struggle that you're engaged in all the time. It's an uphill pull, so that when you resonate as an *I*, you can have a partnership, a *we*, that is more or less at the same level.

COHEN: Right.

WILBER: You've always been working on the intersubjective plane; you're trying to pull intersubjectivity up. We've talked about that so much—you have an authentic self, an *I*, and you have this intersubjective dialogue that you're doing in which you're pulling on that intersubjective plane. I am always sensitive to listening to you talk about that because I think it is an important part of what you do.

COHEN: Yes. And the reason it's so important is because I'm thinking about the future in terms of our evolution as a species. Our current highly developed level of individuation and our capacity to experience higher states are obviously not enough. As we go to higher levels, there's going to be a need for the emergence of a self that transcends and includes individuality. That's when the *I* and the *we* become one, not just as an intersubjective state experience but as an individual and collective stage of development, which would literally be a new world.

WILBER: Yes. Intersubjectivity is not just a state; in other words, the four quadrants arise all the way up and all the way down. As soon as you step out of the unborn, you have four quadrants, and then the question is: How high or how close to the unborn do you want yourself to be? As soon as you step out of the unborn onto the leading edge, if you are really in touch with that ever-present dimension, then you have an authentic self, which is beyond ego and in a sense is beyond individuality. It's right on the edge of the unborn, just to use a clumsy geographical metaphor. So, because there are always four quadrants, what should arise right on the edge of the unborn is the authentic self *in relation with other authentic selves*. It's always intersubjective. There's never a self without an intersubjective dimension.

COHEN: Exactly.

WILBER: But at lower levels, at an egoic stage, you have egos locked in intersubjectivity with other egos.

COHEN: That's called hell. (Laughs)

WILBER: (Laughs) Well, yes, but you know, fifty thousand years ago it was heaven; it was a big advance.

COHEN: It was a new emerging self sense.

WILBER: Yes, exactly. Today's heaven is tomorrow's hell—that's evolution. So the way I see what you're talking about, again just in theoretical terms, is that there is the stage of evolution that we could call the mental egoic self, which for a while was the leading edge. Now it's really yesterday's

news, but people can't get to the next leading-edge stage—which would be an authentic self that goes beyond ego and beyond individuality—without actually transcending it. But maybe a billion years from now, the authentic self will be the thing that the evolutionary pioneers are trying to overcome.

COHEN: Right.

WILBER: But today it is the leading edge. So as I would conceptualize it, what you're doing as a guru is acting as an authentic self trying to get partnership in intersubjectivity with a *we* that is also authentic selves. And I think that's why you have to push against not just *an* ego but an intersubjective *world* of egos. That's where the carpet burn comes from.

COHEN: Exactly. That's what I meant in terms of dealing with ego at a deeper level. When you are working with an individual, you just have to deal with the individual resistance, but when you're working at a more impersonal or collective level, you're dealing with a much deeper resistance that transcends even the individual. You see, what changes at that level is that the point is not the individual's development; it's a much larger context that *needs them*. It's not about their personal process anymore; it's about a vast emergent potential that is utterly dependent *upon them*.

WILBER: I hear you. And let me toss one other thing out that I wanted you to think about a little bit. If you just sort of play with this it might be helpful; I think you'll start to see examples of it as you work as a teacher. There

What's so extraordinary about the authentic self is that it is egoless, and its relationship to life is always an unconditional, absolute, passionate positivity.

andrew cohen

are two things that somebody who is working with evolution, in other words, *higher* growth, is confronted with. Let's take, for example, an individual transitioning between two stages of development. Just for the sake of argument, I'll use teal and turquoise in my system [see diagram, p. 51], which could be level five and level six in any eight-level scheme. And let's say that turquoise is kind of the leading edge. So what somebody at teal is going to be faced with are two similar but different types of tasks. One is, they can be immersed in *higher states*—states that are higher than their present stage can adapt to. It's part of real practice to somehow find access to those states, because they push against your ego and accelerate growth. The best way has always been in the good company of a guru, *satsang* in the *real* sense. Failing that, meditation, or Self-power, takes a tad longer but can nonetheless plunge you into those beyond-yourself states. But when you come out, you're going to come out to your own stage, and you're going to have to start working on it. There is a second thing, though, another kind of growth, or pushing against you, that occurs. The next higher *stage* is going to start to push against you—for example, turquoise is going to push against your teal. These are two similar but different kinds of growth. And I think what is going to be very interesting is to watch how stages and states occur and how they push against the ego. I think they might be kind of different tasks that individuals have to undertake, and I think embrac-

ing "Right View" is part of the second task, related to the next stage, and *satsang* is part of the first, related to higher states. Does that make sense?

COHEN: Yes. You know, one of the problems with the experience of higher states is that the postmodern "sensitive self" just gets drunk on the ecstasy of them and concludes, "Oh, aren't I wonderful!" That's one of the big problems—if one isn't careful, they can actually strengthen the ego instead of pushing against it. That's why when people experience those states in my company and proclaim how clearly they are suddenly seeing everything, I always say, "So does that mean you're going to change now?"

AT THE GROWING TIP

COHEN: Another thing I had wanted to discuss with you was in relationship to what we've been calling the authentic self, which is the evolutionary impulse becoming aware of itself at the level of consciousness. This is really the focus of my teaching these days. What I tell people, based on my own experience and understanding of it, is that the authentic self is a *function* of consciousness that acts in the world but exists in another dimension beyond the world simultaneously. And the question I've been thinking about has to do with the fact that the authentic self seems to be *both a state and a stage at the same time*.

WILBER: Well, I think I have an answer to that question. My opinion is that yes—what you're calling the authentic self, just in generalized terms, is both

a state and a stage. In other words, when you're at the leading edge of evolution, the authentic self is the leading stage, but you can also plunge people into it as a state, because you can have a type of authentic-self experience at several stages and get a taste of it. In terms of my developmental system, just for the sake of argument, the authentic self is the *self at the indigo stage* and it's also the *state self that's causal*, if you know what I mean. So it is a state that can be experienced at different stages, but it's also the actual laying down, or sedimentation, of the leading edge as a stage. Does that make sense?

COHEN: Yes—so it is *both*. That's what it feels like.

WILBER: That's what happens, but it happens only at the growing tip. It doesn't happen anywhere else.

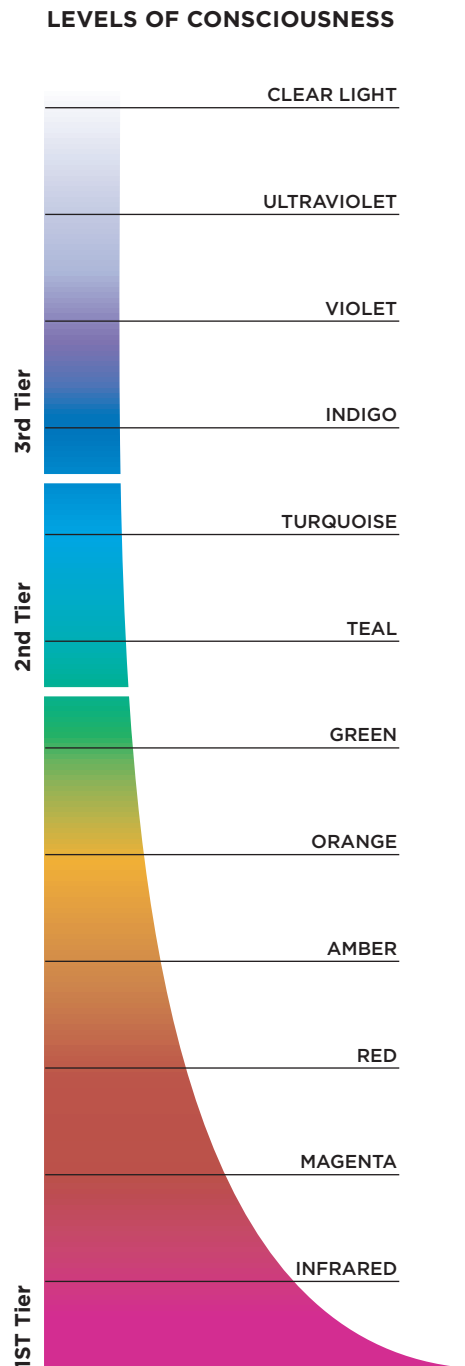
COHEN: Awakening to the authentic self feels like being on a highway that is vibrating, constantly moving forward, that keeps calling us to itself: "You have to get on this, get with this, get into this, this is *it* . . ."

WILBER: I use a similar metaphor: that you're riding a locomotive and laying down railroad tracks at the same time.

COHEN: Yes, exactly! That's terrific.

WILBER: The authentic self railroad! And let me just say one more thing—in ways that we don't quite understand, I think the leading edge that's both a state and a stage probably happens in about a dozen different developmental lines. In other words, if you take an athlete like Tiger Woods, for example,

An integral approach to human development has many components—including quadrants, levels, lines, states, and types. Ken Wilber, integrating over a hundred developmental models in his framework, uses a rainbow color scheme, based on the chakras, to generically represent the levels, or stages, which are loosely grouped into three major tiers: first tier spans from primitive hunter-gatherer consciousness to postmodern, pluralistic consciousness; second tier represents a leap into integral modes of consciousness, which many believe are the leading edge of development today; and third tier ventures into transpersonal, nondual, or enlightened modes of consciousness—levels which are beyond the scope of most Western models.



he's pushing the kinesthetic line right into indigo, so he is like an authentic self in this line. And I think that he would tell you he knows when he's in his authentic self. The same thing can happen in the musical line with great musicians, or in the cognitive line. For example, take Kurt Gödel who at twenty-three years old came up with the Incompleteness Theorem in mathematics. He was right at indigo in the cognitive line, and I think he would tell you he knows when he's in his authentic self. But of course, people like this can come out and be absolute assholes in other areas, because this is just how evolution is. We're an incomplete project in so many ways.

COHEN: But what's so extraordinary about the authentic self in relationship to evolution and enlightenment is that the authentic self *is egoless*, and *its* relationship to life is always an unconditional, absolute, passionate positivity.

WILBER: I think that's *in the self line*. In other words, there are many lines of development, and the center of gravity, of course, is the self line. And so in what you're describing, the authentic self would not be in the cognitive line or the musical line but in the self line—if it really happens. And frankly, you know how rare it is.

COHEN: Yes, I certainly do.

WILBER: It's so hard for it to stick, for just the reasons we've been discussing. There are x-factors that I don't understand and you don't understand, and that perhaps nobody's ever going to understand, but the fact of the matter is, whatever those x-factors are, they're winning.

We really are still pioneers and always will be—half blind, just stumbling along, and God knows what is really going on out there.

ken wilber

But we're also making headway.

The self line is the actual source of I, the proximate I, the sense of I-ness, and at the very peak of that is I-I, the self beyond the self, the selfless ground. And that's available as a state of *turiya* [pure consciousness], but also as this stage that's somewhere in indigo or violet or someplace way up the scale like that. And what happens with a person who has it in the cognitive line or the kinesthetic line—like when Tiger Woods is really connecting with the golf swing and he knows it—he'll tell you that's where his authentic self is, and it is, *temporarily*. But that doesn't mean his center of gravity resides there.

COHEN: I agree with you. When I explain this to people, I always say that the creative impulse, no matter how it expresses itself, *is* the authentic self, but the *highest* level of its expression is the evolutionary impulse at the level of consciousness, the spiritual impulse, the urge that comes from consciousness itself to evolve or transcend itself.

WILBER: Yes.

COHEN: But in your model, you don't have what we're calling the authentic self—or at least not that I've seen.

WILBER: No. But what I've said, though, is that in the way you're describing it, it's a state and a stage, but it's *a stage in the self line*, in other words it's the indigo stage, the leading-edge stage, in the self line. It's a state experience because you can experience it at several different stages, so as you say, you can have people at amber or orange or green or teal or turquoise start speaking from the authentic self.

COHEN: Absolutely.

WILBER: But for the people who really click, their center of gravity is not

orange, it's not green, it's not teal, it's not turquoise; it's someplace in that turquoise to indigo to violet zone—in other words, their self sense *is actually at that level*, and *that's* where the authentic self can stick.

COHEN: It makes a lot of sense.

WILBER: It does, doesn't it? When someone at that level has a state experience, it will stick longer and longer and longer. Whereas if they're at orange, for example, they'll have a state experience of the authentic self and they'll walk out a couple of weeks or months later, and they'll *remember* it. Something will have changed because it will help nudge them up toward green, but *they won't be at indigo*. Does that make sense?

COHEN: Very much. This is what I'm desperately working on. Because I'm convinced that when I get a stable minority of people who can hold the authentic self *as a stage* through all changing states and through the challenges of life, then something is going to happen that's going to make it much easier for other people to take that same leap.

WILBER: Well, yes—it's got to happen in all four quadrants, that means you have to have a *we*, you have to have a fellowship of the ring, a partnership of intersubjectivity at indigo. If you don't have that, it's just not going to stick.

You know, we're all still just infants in figuring this out, and my job as a pandit is to try to bring clarity to this in theoretical terms. And I think if you can see the authentic self as an indigo stage in that self line, but also a state, it can help you explain why "Goddamn it, I worked my ass off for that orange person and nothing really changed . . ."

COHEN: That's right.

WILBER: It gives a clarity, and it helps to see what is going on.

COHEN: Yes. In my work, when I'm challenged most by life and by the difficulties of what I'm trying to do, it often helps enormously to be able to see *how* certain things happen and understand what the causes are. It helps with the emotional challenge. The truth really does set you free.

WILBER: I think so, and I think it's part of a larger aspect of View. There's a whole series of frameworks and views, right up to View with a capital V, in the absolute sense you've been talking about. And all of those frameworks are really about getting straight, in a very positive sense, being able to hold this and manifest it while we really are still pioneers and always will be—half blind, just stumbling along, and God knows what is really going on out there . . .

COHEN: That's exactly how I feel most of the time. If I'm in a teaching position, suddenly I seem to know everything, but actually my everyday experience is that I have no idea what is going on.

WILBER: That's why I think even that discussion on the authentic self is very helpful. And also because I know it's something that in your own particular practice you strive to embody. I mean, you talk about it with such passion, and it's obviously, like you said, your central teaching in many ways.

COHEN: Absolutely. The authentic self is our stepping stone to the future.

WILBER: And I think that seeing it in that sense really clarifies the message of the evolutionary impulse today, which is "*Get indigo, people!*" You know what I mean? ■



Spiritual but not religious

MOVING BEYOND POSTMODERN SPIRITUALITY

by **Elizabeth Debold**

Standing on the bank of India's sacred Ganges as it rushes past Rishikesh, I am captivated by the river's sapphire sparkle. A living luminosity leaps from its many faceted surfaces, transforming the air, the white rocks on the shore, and even my feet as I look down at them. I turn to

look around me and the same luminous sparkle shines from everything: the rocky shore, the bone-thin bodies of the holy men, an emaciated cow, the buildings and hills further on. Surprised, I start to laugh. I've just finished a week of retreat, in silent meditation, and this is my first foray outside the cool, dark ashram and its austere regimen. My perception is heightened—colors vibrate, the rushing river voices a soundless roar, and this extraordinary light suffuses everything. It's alive, I realize; the light is *alive*. Everything around me, the entire world, is transparent, lit from within. I have the sense that I could simply reach out and tear the surface of reality to reveal this underlying blaze. But the ordinary sense of I-am-here-and-the-world-is-out-there is gone. All of the space between is filled—it's all One—and I am not separate from that. I am completely empty and this fullness is everywhere. I laugh: lightness of being is something of a pun. Years later, I will learn that this perception was a glimpse of the *guru mind*.

A Western seeker in the East— isn't this a classic scene from the happy hippie days of the sixties and seventies? But this was the nineties, I was in India with my American spiritual teacher,

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and I'm no hippie. The gold rush days of Westerners going East for enlightenment and the great Zen masters and Hindu yogis coming West that reached a fever pitch in the seventies are now over. Many thousands of flowers have bloomed through this remarkable cross-pollination—an often unacknowledged result of our globalizing world. While the nightly news keeps us aware that globalization has created a world stage for religious conflict, less often do we recognize that the innumerable books on spirituality, the countless martial arts studios, the varied offerings for spiritual retreats and classes in meditation and yoga are also a byproduct of our increased global connectedness. With typical Western ingenuity, we've revealed the mystic heart that beats within the various paths to God or to the Self beyond the self. The burgeoning interfaith movement—often viewed with concern by religious traditionalists—is a result of the growing awareness of

the commonality among different faiths. We've cracked the code of these sacred traditions, plucking pearls of awakening from the hard shell of religious ritual and sacrifice. It's a stunning human achievement. And it's a testament to our enduring search for who we are and why we are here.

However, considering this trend within a larger historical and social context, and reflecting on my own experience, I wonder where the current flourishing of spiritual pursuit is actually taking us. Devising individualized spiritual paths from the cornucopia available in today's spiritual marketplace, more and more of us are seeking outside the context of religion. *Religio*, the root of the word "religion," means to bind—to the Absolute, and also to each other, in a shared cultural understanding of who we are and why we are here. Does this uniquely postmodern spirituality—each of us in a religion of one—have the capacity to bind us into a true global culture? Or do we need something more?

Over the past several decades, the number of people who are seeking—and finding—direct access to the mystical dimension has increased dramatically. Between 1962 and 1994, the percentage of U.S. adults who report having had "a religious or mystical experience" grew from twenty-two to thirty-three percent, and more recent polls indicate that this figure may now be as high as forty percent. While this figure would include the "conversion" experiences that are part of Baptist and other fundamentalist Christian sects,

the number of Americans who identify themselves with a traditional religion has decreased, and those who check "none" when asked for a religious affiliation have doubled in the last decade. These unconventional "nones," who, after Catholics and Baptists, are possibly the third-largest group in the country, comprise some twenty-nine million people. According to a 2001 survey, two-thirds of the "nones" believe in God, more than one-third consider themselves religious, and they buy many books on spirituality. Looking at the rise in numbers of people having spiritual experiences and the decline in traditional religious affiliation, it seems very likely that many of those who are now having mystical experiences are doing so on their own, or in unorthodox ways.

I was clearly a "none," which is rather ironic given that I was raised a Catholic and as a girl thought about being a nun.



It was the “none” sense of wanting a deeper ground to my life that led me to Rishikesh. It wasn’t that I hadn’t invented an incredible life for myself: a family of caring, wonderful friends; a regular practice of Buddhist meditation; a challenging relationship with a brilliant and big-hearted man; and work that drove me, anchored me, and was my emotional center. Passion for my work—about girls’ development and women’s liberation—was a mysterious force in my life. From high school onward, at each critical life juncture, when I made a deeper commitment to it, the world opened up. The more risks I took, the more became possible, leading me from activism to graduate school at Harvard to an extraordinary women’s research group to writing a best-selling book and even to *Oprah*. Given that my mother had raised me to be a good wife and mother, I was often surprised, and almost in awe, at what was unfolding. Yet my life felt flimsy, as though a sudden gust of wind could sweep everything I had put together off the face of the earth. I often felt fake and hollow, and I began to wonder if having a child would make a difference. But wasn’t that an awfully poor reason to bring life into the world? With the help of a good therapist, I had pretty much stopped using emotional drama to add thrills to my life. Instead, I went from one intense project to another, with intermittent bouts of shopping for things that I didn’t need. Sometimes a pair of shoes would haunt me for a week.

So I was in Rishikesh to find something deeper. And by following my teacher’s instructions during the retreat, that strange sense of separation and constant craving fell away into a glorious realization of the perfect goodness of life. I joined the many millions who have glimpsed ultimate Oneness. Given that the path of the mystic has usually been reserved for a few courageous souls—the “special forces” of the religious traditions—these numbers are staggering. We seem to be on the edge of

something significant. But what exactly is it? Some of the New Age’s most beloved prophets—Deepak Chopra, Eckhart Tolle, and Barbara Marx Hubbard, to name a few—believe that such evidence is an indication that we are in the process of a global transformation of consciousness. Paul Ray, author (with Sherry Anderson) of the popular *Cultural Creatives*, has estimated that twenty million people in the U.S. are “in the process of awakening.” And he’s recently stated that a total of nearly four million people in the U.S. and Europe are close to attaining a stable personal awakening.

While this is compelling news, the real significance of this surge in spiritual experience will depend on how we make sense out of the experiences themselves. Genuine moments of transcendent grace are experienced by fundamentalists, fatalists, and contemporary seekers of freedom alike. However, the fundamentalist sees in the experience an utter validation of a personal relationship to the One True God in which he or she believes. What happens when the religious context isn’t there—when we take spirituality out of the traditions and experience transcendence on its own?

Spirituality and religion are like romance and marriage, argues one Unitarian Universalist minister. “Without the traditions and legal structures of marriage to contain it and sustain it, romance is always in danger of flaming out or heading down blind alleys, extinguished as quickly as it first appeared.” But for most of us living in a contemporary postmodern context, the very *idea* of religion may evoke a sense of stricture, empty ritual, and blind adherence to precepts that are out of step with our time. A recent poll suggests that of the one in five Americans who see themselves as “spiritual but not religious,” forty-seven percent view religion negatively. Although religion creates a structure for the highest truths that have been revealed to us, providing an ethical and moral context for

our lives, for many of us today, spirituality and religion aren't wedded together—they are divorced (and thankfully so). But I wonder if our discomfort with the notion of religion may be partially due to our collective amnesia about the significance religion has had in human transformation.

Where we stand at the beginning of the third millennium makes it difficult to understand the power of religious traditions that were founded two or more millennia ago. Human consciousness has evolved so much that it is almost inconceivable to grasp what life was like as the great religions emerged and then rose in prominence across the globe. Imagine being bound in a rigid social hierarchy to the small group of people with whom you share a language and customs, living in a frighteningly violent and disease-ridden world teeming with demons and supernatural forces. Murder and mayhem are common; demonic forces throw people into uncontrollable rages and lusts. Strange and unpredictable things happen—your child is born deformed, bringing disfavor on your tribe, which leads to a drought that ruins the crops. You don't know why these things happen or whether your people will be successful in appeasing the gods. Skirmishes with other tribes may result in your death or your capture and enslavement. Most of your life is spent trying to avoid the wrath of the gods or anyone above you in the social hierarchy, as you toil in backbreaking labor just to eke out survival. An inescapable parade of horrors is most likely part of your existence: “perpetual war, senseless violence, ritual sacrifice, systemic abuse, and mind-numbing repetition,” as Robert Godwin documents in his remarkable *One Cosmos under God*. And he notes that although roughly one hundred million people died due to war in the twentieth century, it is estimated that if the world was still populated only by tribes, this number would be twenty times larger.

Miraculously, as if in response to a crying human need, the great religious traditions either emerged or transformed in the span of about one thousand years to embrace humanity in a new vision of the future. This era is what historian Karl Jaspers identified as the Axial Age, seeing in it the dawning of “what was later called reason and personality.” We are still indebted to the insights of the sages and saints who walked on earth then: Lao-tzu, Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ, Socrates, Confucius, Jeremiah, and Muhammad. From approximately 800 BCE to 200 CE, there was a dramatic shift away from identification with one's tribe and toward the development of individual consciousness—giving birth to the first truly individual sense of self. Before this, as Godwin explains, a human being “felt his own impulses were ‘not truly part of the self, since they [were] not within man's conscious control.’” Tumultuous emotions,

like rage, envy, and lust, were thought to be “a supernatural attack [by gods or demons] from the outside.” So, for example, it wasn't your own lust driving you to distraction over an attractive neighbor, but the zing of Eros' arrow. It was only during the Axial Age that human beings gradually began to recognize, and take responsibility for, those forces of good and evil that they had projected onto the gods. As theologian Ewert Cousins tells us, “‘Know thyself’ became the watchword of Greece; the Upanishads identified the Atman, the transcendent center of the self. The Buddha charted the way of individual enlightenment; the Jewish prophets awakened individual moral responsibility.” Practices of inquiry, meditation, petitionary prayer, and confession were developed to give humanity the practical means of cultivating an inner sense of responsibility and, most importantly, a moral conscience.

How many of us postmodern Westerners today think of the moral teachings of religion as a revolutionary step for humanity? I've always related to the basic commandments of the Judeo-Christian tradition as a combination of the quaintly outmoded and the commonsensical. Certain commandments—*Thou shalt not kill*, *Thou shalt not steal*—make such perfect sense, it's hard to realize that they were a radical challenge to people's lack of self-control several thousand years ago. Others—like *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image*—are odd remnants of a long-ago time. But for me, the Commandments themselves weren't the real problem—it was the pervasive sense of Catholic guilt, of being in a state of sin. Guilt was a lead weight on the freedom that was lifting my generation at the end of the last century. I was utterly fascinated by the words attributed to Christ in the Bible. I wanted what he was experiencing, his connection with the sacred, not a set of rules to follow. And that desire for contact with the Source unmediated by the doctrines and dogmas of religion is what many of us mean when we call ourselves “spiritual but not religious.”

Strange as it may seem to us today, it was the development of an individual sense of conscience—accompanied by the painful experience of guilt—that enabled us to step out of the shadows and begin to author history. As long as we humans felt ourselves to be mere victims of powerful and uncontrollable forces, both internally and externally, there was no way to be responsible or to make choices that would lead toward salvation—in this life or the next. “Only an independent self has the power to recognize its guilt and confess its wrongdoing,” write social scientists James and Evelyn Whitehead, and that recognition makes each person “responsible for his [or her] own actions.” In the West, Christ's message that every soul was beloved by God created a personal bond between God and each of his people that was the

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context for developing this sense of responsibility. As Richard Tarnas writes in his brilliant opus *The Passion of the Western Mind*, “By granting immortality and value to the individual soul, Christianity encouraged the growth of the individual conscience, self-responsibility, and personal autonomy relative to temporal powers—all decisive traits for the formation of the Western character.” Christianity—and all of the major religions of the Axial Age—gave each human being a way out, off the cycling wheel of toil and trouble, to reach the salvation of heaven. But this demanded strict obedience to one’s relationship to God and to the extraordinary order of God’s creation, manifested in the dazzling perfection of the Great Chain of Being. For the first time, we had a moral obligation to bring ourselves in line with that perfection. And if we broke that sacred covenant, thereby sinning, which literally means

“missing the mark,” we felt guilty, and that guilt propelled us to do right and create a civilization to celebrate God’s Kingdom on earth. Each Christian knew his or her place in the cosmos and God’s heart and knew that through piety and sacrifice, it was possible to abide for eternity with Him in the afterlife.

I think it would be safe to say that the very lack of that context—the absence of that sense of knowing my place in the cosmos and in God’s heart—brought me to Rishikesh. I could no longer find that sense of place in the religion of my youth. As a child, I was deeply moved by the imposing majesty of Catholic ritual. I was in awe of the statues of the beautiful long-haired man nailed to the cross with blood dripping from his wounds and the lovely lady in blue balancing on a globe with a snake crushed under her pretty feet. But that seems like more than a lifetime ago. Twenty, thirty years later, after so many years

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of schooling, I know too much, and perhaps not enough. My intellect has been sharpened by the objectivity of science and a classically modern education that tells me that life emerged from a random, purposeless process and that science is the key to all human progress. But both the longing in my heart and the inadequacy of science and technology to create a truly just world called that into question. Those of us born after the Second World War no longer stand on the ground that has supported humanity through the ages—religion, nation, the notion of progress, or even family. *Thou shalt honor thy father and mother*, the Bible says. But my parents each move into the darkening years of their lives alone, while I am free to roam. Postmodernity—the transitional era that we are now in—is my milieu. We postmoderns have seen through, and detached ourselves from, all that has given meaning to human life in prior generations. It gives me enormous freedom. But the price I pay is that I'm all alone.

Perhaps ironically, it is that aloneness—the acutely self-conscious, self-reflective, responsible, and independent individual sense of self—that became possible through the spiritual explosion of the Axial Age and the development of the world's great religions. Over the two thousand years since, human beings have taken increasing responsibility for the miracle and burden of being conscious. In fact, when the

bureaucratic dogmatism of the Church threatened to stifle the development of independent thought, another explosion in consciousness erupted—what we call the Western Enlightenment. This ignited the scientific revolution that has defined modernity. No longer was God the ultimate Creator and Judge; we took the power of creativity and objective reason back into ourselves. This was an event of enormous *spiritual* significance. We so often think of the birth of science as a purely rational affair because it has led to such a reductionistic materialism, the belief that all of life can be reduced to random processes inherent in matter. But one only needs to listen to Voltaire to dispel that notion: “Meditation is the dissolution of thoughts in eternal awareness or Pure consciousness without objectification, knowing without thinking, merging finitude in infinity.” Voltaire was searching for direct contact with the eternal—for a spiritual, but not religious, enlightenment.

Oddly enough, many of us today who are seeking the spiritual without religion are looking for relief from the world that Voltaire and his brother *philosophes* have wrought. Three hundred years later, the demand to create and to produce in a globalizing world has cost us our job security and often seems to threaten our sanity. Our constantly whirling minds—the endless internal to-do lists, fantasies about our weekend plans, inner dialogues with different parts of ourselves—are leading us to pop Prozac, hike in the wilderness, lie down on the therapist's couch, or sit alone in meditation. The pressure is only escalating. And we are desperate for a way out—sometimes just simple relief that can be bought on the cheap in a bar. But others of us are looking for something deeper, wondering what is permanent and real in a world where everything is disposable. And so we seek, looking to have some experience of the ultimate that will take us beyond ourselves and relieve us from the uncertainty and confusion of our lives. No wonder that Andrew Delbanco observes in *The Real American Dream* that “the most striking feature of contemporary culture is the unslaked craving for transcendence.”

How do we satisfy that craving? With neither religion nor science nor -isms of any kind “organizing desire into a structure of meaning,” as Delbanco says, what do we have that meets the depth of our longing for the More that transcends the mundane? We're caught in a postmodern paradox: we desperately long for the embrace of something larger, all-encompassing, and real, and yet all we trust is the narrow bandwidth of the self. Our feelings—what *feels* right or good or true—have become our compass through life. Significant numbers of us—“nearly four out of ten teens (38%) and three out of ten adults (31%),” according to a 2002 poll by the Barna Group—base our moral choices only on “whatever feels right or comfortable.” Guilt,

and the sense of being obligated to something other than oneself, is out of the question. It makes us feel uncomfortable. Thus, we are left with nothing greater than the span of our feelings to bind us to life and each other. And so the seeking of pleasure, Delbanco argues, becomes our “last link to the feeling of transcendence . . .

the ‘last sacrament of the dispossessed.’” Without being accountable to anything larger than the impulse to satisfy our cravings, even our spiritual pursuits can leave us empty. When the Transcendent is revealed to me by the Ganges, what do I do with that revelation of the radiant mystery that imbues creation with life? My heart knows that this luminosity is the face of God,

the Ultimate, the Creative Principle. IT is I and all things: there is no separation. My place in the universe has become transparent to me, simply by my uniquely human capacity to know and to recognize that which I witness. This glimpse of the Reality behind reality radically challenges the island of “I” that I have always thought myself to be. I am literally in ecstasy, meaning “unstuck,” released from the confines of my separate sense of self and acutely aware of everything around me. Curious, I lean forward and feel a pull. The thought, *this changes everything*, flashes through my mind. There is something more that I am being called to—an obligation to this Whole. Something higher than my self is calling me to surrender . . . and what do I do? I exult in the *feeling* of ecstasy, the experience of freedom and satisfaction. The next day, the direct experience of Oneness has faded, and as it fades into memory, I begin to crave that incredible feeling, almost instantly forgetting its significance and what it was pointing to. I just want another blast from beyond, one that will take me to a bliss beyond pain, boredom, and craving *again*. Nothing has changed. So I keep moving on, craving more. And after the next experience, I will once again move on, seeking another experience. And then one more . . .

This is what it means to be one of the dispossessed, to be alone with a racing mind and aching heart, seeking emotional relief within the shallow confines of the self while avoiding pain or struggle or guilt. How many hours of therapy have we collectively clocked to try to find some relief from the intensity of our thoughts and feelings? How much bliss and ecstasy do we need to have before we will be satisfied? Without a larger *raison*

d'être than the desire for self-satisfaction, we will only find narcissism—an endless hall of mirrors—at the end of our spiritual search. We have come to a “borderline” in our individualistic culture, says philosopher Roland Benedikter, where “we have just two possibilities: go toward despair or go one step beyond.”

It was only during the Axial Age that human beings began to recognize, and take responsibility for, those forces of good and evil that they had projected onto the gods.

Even though many of us may understandably long for a simpler time, it's too late. We can't go back. “Radical changes taking place around the globe are propelling us quickly into what can be called the Second Axial Age,” observed Brother Wayne Teasdale. After two thousand and some years, a portion of humanity has finally won the prize of an individuated consciousness. Now, argue the Whiteheads, “recent discoveries of the genetic code for life; the globalization of national economies; the growing recognition that humans are responsible for the health of their environment—all these events compel the human community toward a new level of consciousness and conscience.” Those of us who benefit so much from our interconnected world have to develop further, to widen our perspective and deepen our sense of responsibility. “The earlier shift was from a [tribal] collective to an individual consciousness,” says theologian Leonard Swidler, but as we move toward a worldwide culture, a second Axial Age becomes possible as “consciousness is now becoming global.” In such a complex and interdependent world, we cannot develop commandments to cover all of the difficult ethical issues that human ingenuity has led us to, such as cloning, resource depletion, and genetic engineering. Just as the great sages of the first Axial Age launched the great traditions, we need “spiritual geniuses,” says Karen Armstrong, author of *A History of God*, to inspire a new kind of religion—a contemporary moral and philosophical context for making sense of our lives.

Such a new religion would demand that we be beholden to something far larger than ourselves—to the Truth revealed in

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those exquisite moments of transcendence. "Having developed self-reflective, analytic, critical consciousness in the first Axial Age," writes Cousins, "we must now, while retaining these values, reappropriate and integrate into that consciousness . . . collective and cosmic dimensions." *If*, that is, we can step beyond the trap of narcissistic self-satisfaction. As Benedikter comments, "Such a step would come from an evolved, rational mind that is aware of something beyond its own activity, beyond the ego—one that rediscovers an objectivity that comes from the void beyond the self where one discovers, as Hegel said, that one is not thinking one's own thoughts, but that the cosmic order is thinking thoughts through me. But you cannot avoid going through the void and the death of your normal self to reach this place."

It's more a leap than a step—beyond solitary seeking by the Ganges, beyond the "spiritual but not religious." The stirrings of spiritual longing in the hearts and minds of so many of us

postmodern individualists may well be the first tremors of this second Axial Age. As Cousins says, this "is not only a creative possibility to enhance the twenty-first century; it is an absolute necessity if we are to survive." The spiritual accomplishment of the last Axial Age—the development of a self-reflective individual eager for transcendence—is no longer enough. Now that we can be responsible for ourselves, we next have to take responsibility for the whole of which we are a part. "We need to preserve the holiness of the single 'I,'" Benedikter says, "and form a community where those single 'I's can transform themselves and break through to a critical and contemporary spirituality." Rooted in mystical depth, transcending the narcissistic self, engaging in an ecstatic rationality, we can create a new religious context for an awakening world. A religion that calls us to realize our deepest collective purpose, bound together as the living expression of the mind and heart of God in a cosmic act of mutual Self-creation. ■



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Lifestyles of the
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An Excursion into America's Newest Yoga Trend

by Maura R. O'Connor

Anthing is possible in America; everything goes. Could the ramifications of yogi Swami Vivekananda's 1893 visit to the Parliament of the World's Religions possibly have been known? Who could have believed it would result

in this? Madison Avenue. Versace and Christian Dior doused in spring sunshine, standing in a marble entryway with inlaid mahogany walls, waiting with the concierge for the elevator. Up one floor and here we are—exhale. No, literally. Exhale is a yoga studio and “mindbodyspa” dedicated to helping people transform their inner and outer selves. Step through the threshold flanked by two-hundred-year-old sliding wooden doors imported from Asia. Enter into a “new paradigm in the well-being world,” a realm of luxury where you can view the “menu of spa therapies” and order a “four-handed body enlightening massage,” “true transformation facial,” or “guided relaxation” that will “awaken your consciousness.” Yoga has never felt so good. I finger the supersoft jersey spandex clothes for sale before moving on to the array of candles in frosted white glass. Scents of “Magnolia,” “Green Tea + Rose,” and “Tangerine Lemongrass” with names like “Prana.” Spirituality has never smelt so good.

It’s a fully, perfectly postmodern fusion, this new beast we call yoga today. An ancient Indian tradition, five thousand years old, co-opted by the inexorable forces of American culture. Twenty million yogis across fifty states now do downward dog. Twenty-five million more people will try it this year. Yoga is the thing hundreds of thousands of people are styling their entire lives after—a modern spiritual path born in our image. It is also a twenty-seven-billion-dollar-a-year industry, projected to nearly double by the end of 2005, with products ranging from six-hundred-dollar Prada yoga mat bags to two-dollar incense sticks. Videos, CDs, DVDs, clothing, and accessories—unless you’re Bikram Choudhury, founder of the world’s first yoga franchise, you can’t actually “sell” asanas (yoga postures), but you can make people feel they need a variety of commodities to do them. For the aspiring yogi armed with a credit card there are thousands of options to choose from. And it is pervasive. Walk into the supermarket and yoga is on the cover of *Time*; turn on the television, it’s starring in Nike, Tic-Tac, J. Crew, and Jeep commercials. MTV has its own power yoga video series featuring members of the *Real World* and live DJs; hip-hop record label mogul Russell Simmons has his own *Yoga Live* DVD, whose infomercial features guest appearances from Donald Trump and P. Diddy. These days, the image of a beautiful woman resting in the lotus position, eyes gently closed, bronzed stomach taut and exposed, selling authentic peace and happiness on the merit of her authentic sexiness is stock photography for advertisers eager to capitalize on yoga’s ever-increasing popularity among the masses.

Dozens of yoga teachers are also riding the crest of yoga’s popularity—some (Sean Corn, Baron Baptiste, Cyndi Lee, Shiva Rea, and Rodney Yee) to celebrity heights. In a recent *New York Times* article, journalist Mary Billard wrote that “among

their fans they have the aura of rock stars. When Mr. Yee, his long dark hair flowing, strides into the registration area with his blond fiancée . . . it’s as though Mick Jagger had appeared.” Yee, the man *Time* magazine deemed the “stud-muffin guru,” appeared on *Oprah* in 2001 to teach a yoga class in front of twenty-two million people and recently signed endorsement deals with health food purveyors Nasoya and Vitasoy. Oprah’s website states, “Yoga is the practice that has helped everyone from celebrities to stressed-out moms lose weight, gain energy,

Russell Simmons has his own *Yoga Live* DVD, whose infomercial features appearances from Donald Trump and P. Diddy.

improve their health, and connect with themselves.” When Puerto Rican heartthrob Ricky Martin, most famous for exuberantly gyrating his hips while singing “Living La Vida Loca,” appeared on the show, he testified to yoga’s powers. “It’s fascinating,” he said. “Once again, it’s all about getting to know your ‘self.’ Connecting your heart and your mind in order for you not to make obsessive or compulsive decisions in life. Simplicity is the medicine.” Countless other celebrities practice yoga. There are the usual suspects (Madonna, Sting) and then some not so obvious—Al Pacino, Pamela Anderson, and Kirk Hammett from Metallica, the heavy metal band that, after carrying the torch of human angst for twenty-five years, recently discovered therapy together in the documentary *Some Kind of Monster*.

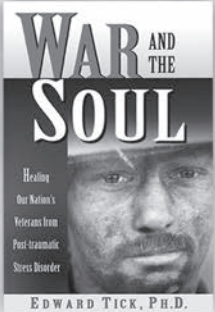
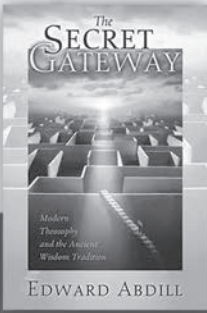
I thought I might meet a few celebrities at the mindbodyspa Exhale, but the only ones in sight are in the paparazzi photographs of Gwyneth Paltrow and Drew Barrymore next to the holistic skin products they’ve purportedly used. One hundred twenty-five dollars for half an ounce of age reversal skin cream? Ah, it’s engineered from neonatal human foreskin. In this situation one need only heed Exhale’s advice and “surrender to spa therapy.” I came to see Exhale’s Hip-Hop Power Yoga class that promises an “energetic and challenging vinyasa practice for all levels to the beats of 50 Cent.” 50 Cent is the crack dealer turned multimillionaire rap star whose recent

hit "Candy Shop" goes: "I'll take you to the candy shop / I'll let you lick the lollipop / Go 'head girl, don't you stop / Keep going til you hit the spot." 50 Cent doesn't practice yoga, but one of his songs mentions it: "The 16 top shot loader'll bend ya ass up like yoga." Unfortunately, the class is full. Instead I peruse the über-healthy gourmet café selling herbal tonics and protein cookies with seeds before venturing into one of the Core Fusion classes that mashes yoga, Pilates, and orthopedic stretching into one regimen to produce "a flexible, youthful body and a sense of peace and relaxation." I watch as the predominantly female class stretches, breathes, and sweats, all the while noting the polished Indonesian wood floors, neo-Asian garnishes, imperial marble pillars, and high ceilings draped in elegant green gauze.

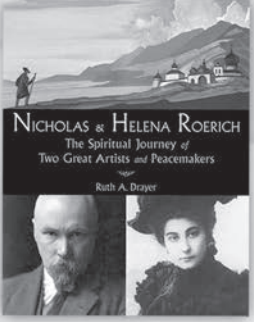
Yoga, like spandex, has proved to be a perfect fit for the American populace by virtue of its elasticity. For decades it was merely the pastime of seekers and hippies on the fringes of the East-meets-West counterculture. It wasn't until the 1980s that the number of yoga practitioners climbed into the millions as people's body awareness and health consciousness increased and they sought new forms of physical exercise. But even then

it was simply an alternative workout cut loose from its roots in Hindu religion and spiritualism. Then during the 1990's, the self-improvement phenomenon exploded and spread like a contagion throughout the nation. Yoga was now much more than a workout: it was America's favorite secular fix-it drug, a means to unwind, relieve stress, find clarity of mind, lose weight, heal oneself emotionally or physically, and tone buttocks. And shortly thereafter, for those who had found themselves marooned on the desert islands of their increasingly materialistic, secular lifestyles, it became a source of spiritual fulfillment. "For efficiency-oriented Americans, a workout that can double as a spiritual exercise, and even triple as a substitute for going to the shrink, is understandably appealing," wrote Rebecca Mead in her article on ashtanga yoga for the *New Yorker*. Spiritual seeker and yoga teacher Suzanne Clores wrote in a recent essay for *Body & Soul*, undoubtedly voicing the experience of many others, "While I could not walk the path of St. Catherine of Siena or St. Francis of Assisi and shun material items, social life, and other worldly things holy people relinquish, I still craved spiritual depth. . . . It was three years before I found yoga."

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“We practice yoga between business meetings, meditate on the subway, and move our modern furniture in ancient ways to enhance the flow of chi.”

Breathe magazine

In its mission statement, *Breathe*, the newest yoga lifestyle magazine to hit the newsstands, evokes the mindset of today’s yogi. “We don’t live on a mountain. We live in this world,” it says. “We practice yoga between business meetings, meditate on the subway, and move our modern furniture in ancient ways to enhance the flow of chi. We seek an authentic life. *Breathe* is a unique new magazine that understands the desire to go deeper, to find meaning and balance while living in a material world.” *Breathe’s* target demographic is the same as that of a host of other lifestyle magazines: *Organic*

Style, Body & Soul (recently purchased by Martha Stewart Omnimedia), *Real Simple*, *Spirituality & Health*, *Yoga International*, and *Yoga Journal*. The readers of these magazines are overwhelmingly female—at least eighty percent—and nearly all are college-educated professionals whose annual income is, on average, around \$90,000. In 1998, when the thirty-year-old *Yoga Journal* brought in new management and revamped its look in favor of the breezy, cheery slickness of many mainstream women’s magazines on the shelves today, it was promptly rewarded with a tripling in circulation and a readership of one million. *Organic Style* has a fan base of 6.6 million. *Real Simple* has 4.5 million. All of these magazines share a similar aesthetic—for example, they each have the signature minimal-makeup-wearing, skin-glowing, lots-of-flesh-showing, young-woman-in-a-yoga-pose or holding-a-piece-of-healthy-fruit sort of covers. In describing its archetypal reader, *Body & Soul’s* media kit for potential advertisers explains, “She’s the active trendsetter who’s taken the best ideas of natural self-care and holistic living and is fully

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integrating them into her *whole life*. This woman wants more than a healthy body. She also wants a healthy soul and a meaningful life. . . . The Whole Woman is not only idealistic—she’s pragmatic as well. She eats organic foods to avoid chemicals, and also because they *taste* better. She does yoga to balance her mind and spirit, and also to *work out*. . . . Our readers want more out of life . . . and, with an average household income of \$103,589—they can afford it!”

Within six months of its launch, *Breathe*, whose slogan is “Inhale Life,” was printing 150,000 copies of every issue. The magazine is filled with spreads on art and architecture; tidbits on “conscious capitalism”; music, book, and movie reviews; yoga products; and articles on spirituality. Beautifully designed on subtle matte recycled paper, it’s a sophisticated product, leaps and bounds removed from the standard New Age fare. “We’re not the type of magazine that would just be about hemp clothes,” Lisa Haines, the founder and editorial director told me. “We’re somewhere between *Yoga Journal* and *Vanity Fair*.” Indeed, *Breathe* features fashion spreads with clothes by designers like Yohji Yamamoto and ads for diamond watches, fine vodka, luxury hotels, Land Rovers, Aston Martins, and yoga retreats in hip urban metropolises like Berlin or tropical locales such as the Caribbean. Each issue has an unconventional celebrity on the cover—Susan Sarandon, Willem Dafoe, Woody Harrelson, or Lili Taylor. “What do you think spirituality means to your readers?” I ask Haines. “There’s so much out there, and it’s all spirit!” she says. “As many readers as we have, there are that many different spiritual paths.”

Individual wellness quotients fully optimized, the ladies from the Core Fusion class take leave of the studio and make their way to Exhale’s café. I follow suit. I am trying to decide between a “Smiling Buddha” smoothie or the “Virtual Buddha” herbal tonic when I notice *New York* magazine lying on one of the sleek modernistic leather sofas. There’s an article inside called “An Illicit Yoga Love Story”—a report on Rodney Yee’s affair with his student Colleen Saidman and their elopement to the Hamptons. She has her own yoga studio there with regular clients such as Christy Turlington, Christie Brinkley, and Russell Simmons. Saidman tells the *New York* interviewer, “The teacher-student relationship is very complicated. That can definitely be taken advantage of

by a teacher. And I think a teacher shouldn’t go there. Even though we did.” Coincidentally, Exhale has a location in the Hamptons. In fact there are more than a dozen yoga studios in the Hamptons and many more spas, some of which offer yoga classes. But most popular at these spas are services like “Borikue Nut” hair treatments, “Aqua Latte Foaming Milk” baths, facials that will “inspire visions of delicious desserts with black cherry and pumpkin enzymes using cassis creme,” and “Four-Handed Moon Shower” body treatments. Inspired by an ancient ritual among Colombia’s Chibcha Indians, the four-handed moon shower body treatment involves two technicians who will “scrub you down with brown sugar and Jamu Thai oil, then wrap you in a mask of strawberries, peaches, rose petals, pineapple, cinnamon, yogurt and a touch of red wine to cocoon you while four hands massage your scalp and feet and your hands are bathed in paraffin.”

Sipping a “Liquid Yoga” tonic, I immerse myself in *Breathe*’s newest issue featuring a diaphanous Julie Delpy on the cover. I read a dialogue between Moby and Eddie

Stern on the meaning of life and a review of rapper Missy Elliot’s new album, and I learn of a new eco-spa that’s opened in South Africa. Called Grootbos, its slogan is “Luxury living in harmony with nature.” Apparently, during the fall season at Grootbos, “whales breed just beside the pools, where visitors [can] sip champagne and watch them play.”

The most important thing to remember is that “Exhale is a lifestyle.” Indeed, this is one of the yoga studio/mindbodyspa’s mantras. I repeat it to myself as I finally leave through the sliding wooden doors imported from Asia, take the elevator down one floor, walk through the inlaid mahogany entryway with marble floors and out onto Madison Avenue doused in spring sunshine. The warm rays of the sun are almost blinding as they cast their white light on America’s most luxuriant shopping district, and for a moment the four-thousand-dollar Gucci purses and fifteen-thousand-dollar Versace dresses in the store windows are bathed in a kind of heavenly luminosity. It’s ethereal, as if everything is suddenly endowed with a shiny new veneer of transcendence and an aura of godliness, and all distinctions between sublime and ridiculous, sacred and profane are magically dissolved in the heart of America. ■

At the eco-spa Grootbos, “whales breed just beside the pools, where visitors can sip champagne and watch them play.”

In search of my

“If from anybody one should understand the Doctrine preached by the Fully Enlightened One, devoutly should one revere him, as a Brahmana reveres the sacrificial fire.”

Gautama Buddha, Dhammapada

“The number one [characteristic of postmodern individuals] is an ironic defense against the possibility of being duped. That’s the main thing they don’t want to happen to them. And of course, believing anything with any great conviction sets you up for making a fool of yourself if you ever turn out to be wrong.”

Thomas de Zengotita



perfect teacher



Filmmaker Lesley Ann Patten attempts to come to terms with her Tibetan Buddhist guru, Dzongsar Rinpoche—the man she has hired to “assassinate” her.

by Jessica Roemischer

Across the mystical traditions and over the course of millennia, the enlightened teacher has been the holy grail of the spiritual quest. “Through the blessings and kindness of the guru, great bliss, the realization of emptiness, and the union of samsara and nirvana can be obtained instantly,” says the Chakrasamvara tantra. Indeed, history and human consciousness are suffused with the almost mythical accounts of those spiritual masters through the ages who opened the way for many to enter sublime and transcendent realms. And aligned with these great teachers, students often became legendary in their own right, the “guru principle” having activated a force of purification and love so powerful that the disciples were irrevocably transformed.

Surprisingly, the revered tradition of the guru-disciple relationship began to emerge in a secular society amid the newfound freedoms and cultural pluralism of our postmodern world. Beginning in the 1960s, as a steady stream of Asian teachers made their way West, a generation of Western seekers, untethered from their own religious and cultural traditions,

turned to embrace the medieval customs of Tibet or China or India—colorful and novel delivery systems for enlightened consciousness—that these teachers brought here. The gurus themselves became highly magnetic objects of rapt attention—seemingly miraculous, living expressions of wisdom, compassion, love, and illuminated awareness. But the story of Eastern gurus and Western students over the past forty years has often begun as an idyllic honeymoon and all too frequently has given way to a rocky marriage. Fraught with the difficulties of bridging a vast cultural divide in a time of increasing psychological and social complexity, the journey of the spiritual aspirant and the Eastern teacher is an especially challenging one.

In her full-length film, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Lesley Ann Patten has perfectly captured both the dilemma of the contemporary spiritual seeker and the dilemma of the guru. The movie is a poignant and powerful portrayal of the cultural, psychological, and spiritual difficulties faced by so many who have been drawn to the promise of a transcendent possibility, and to Eastern teachers and teachings. And it evokes the



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question: In a twenty-first-century world, can the traditional guru awaken the seeker to his or her own true heart and catalyze enlightenment?

A student of the highly revered Tibetan Buddhist lama Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, Patten's documentary chronicles her spiritual and intercontinental odyssey alongside two other Westerners as she follows Dzongsar across the world. She is pursuing him in the hope that he can fulfill her lifelong yearning for enlightenment—that, in fact, he is her “perfect teacher.” Filmed in the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Germany, and Dzongsar's homeland of Bhutan, Patten's colorful portrayal of her spiritual quest is part autobiography and part travelogue. It grows out of her attempt to come to terms with her own ambivalence about the student-teacher relationship, as well as her ambivalence about this jet-setting, enigmatic, and elusive Tibetan lama. He is a man uniquely straddling two worlds, East and West, a teacher who alternately inspires and exasperates her.

Patten opens the film by imparting the story of the Buddha's awakening and explaining why, in Buddhism, the guru is so important: “The Buddha said this enlightenment could be realized in one lifetime or over many. It is the birthright of every human being, but to perfect it you need a teacher.” Her invocation of this central tenet of Buddhism accompanies shots of the serene and mountainous landscape of Bhutan. This is followed by a sequence of images that takes us from London's Big Ben, to the faces of Bhutanese boys at a Buddhist ceremony, to the hustle of urban streets at rush hour, to her traveling companions, to the carefully folded fingers of Tibetan monks in Buddhist ritual, to a game of street ball in Los Angeles, to Dzongsar himself. This first sequence is a cinematic overture to what will follow; it is postmodern pastiche as global odyssey, where the episodic vignettes of countries, cultures, friends, family, and the revered teacher alternate between East and West—the two worlds Dzongsar himself inhabits, and the two worlds that Patten, as Dzongsar's Western student, is trying to reconcile.

Like many of her generation, Patten was driven by a strange disaffection and isolation that had haunted her since her youth, and she sensed some higher and deeper possibility beyond the circumstances of family, life, and culture that she found herself in. “As a child, I would escape to tales of foreign lands. I longed to meet an extraordinary teacher, the Merlin who could help me pull the sword from the stone.” Her spiritual yearning eventually found a worthy object in Dzongsar Rinpoche, who held “a strange attraction” and whose background was clearly “not ordinary.” And yet, while she was passionately drawn to him as

the means to fulfill her hunger for a transcendent reality, the film ultimately reveals the perennial battle so often waged in the mind and heart of the spiritual seeker—the battle between that which fervently resists submission to the teacher and that which deeply recognizes that surrender and trust can bring to fruition a lifelong aspiration for enlightenment.

Born into a traditional feudal culture and recognized as an incarnation of one of the most admired Tibetan Buddhist teachers of the prior two centuries, Dzongsar Rinpoche is, indeed, “not ordinary.” Raised among a family of preeminent Vajrayana Buddhist masters, he is heir to an august lineage—a lineage that rests on the inextricable relationship between enlightenment and the living awakened teacher, the revealer of

“I longed to meet an extraordinary teacher, the Merlin who could help me pull the sword from the stone.”

Lesley Ann Patten

that ineffable and peerless state of freedom. As Patten explains, the Vajrayana tradition was brought to Tibet from India in the eighth century by the great Buddhist saint Padmasambhava. It emphasizes that the “most important reference point a student has is a teacher who points the way . . . [using] all means necessary to help students awaken to their own inner wisdom and compassion.” “The truth of the matter,” Dzongsar has written, “is that the guru has all the qualities of the Buddha. He is the Buddha; he is the dharma; he is the sangha; he is everything.”

And yet, as Patten's film illustrates so clearly, embracing this mythic ideal is particularly difficult for those born into our contemporary milieu, where so many of the traditional structures of hierarchy and authority, including spiritual authority, have given way to a culture in which self-reliant independence is held as most sacred. As her film also reveals, the psychology of postmodernism is strikingly contradictory, and the flip side of this heightened individualism can often be the doubt, mistrust, and weak faith that undergird the vague discontent so particular to our time.

Nonetheless, Patten is compelled to pursue a higher spiritual calling—and Dzongsar Rinpoche. Together with her two fellow “ducklings”—as she refers to herself and her two companions, Luc Dierckx and Louise Rodd—she follows him from London to Germany and finally to Bhutan, “bedazzled” by his



presence. “I don’t want to be a minute away from him,” says Luc, a computer programmer from Vancouver. “There’s never one instant that Rinpoche is not teaching something, if you’re willing to view it as such.” At the same time, his enigmatic, outrageous, and often unpredictable behavior seems to be deliberately designed to cause them to doubt.

From the outset of the film, we witness Dzongsar’s antics, which are sometimes met with offhand comments by Luc and Louise, a tarot card reader from London, as well as by Patten herself. Dzongsar is shown stealthily disembarking from a London bus, leaving Luc scrambling to catch him. Later on, he manages to evade the filmmaker and her companions at the Munich airport—despite having arranged to meet them there—leaving them in the lurch for hours. Louise remarks that “you’re meant to see him as this great, great being, and then on another level, you could think, ‘Is this all my imagi-

nation?’ So you end up chasing your tail. It’s like being in a bizarre kind of comedy.”

“I became Rinpoche’s right-hand man overnight,” Luc describes. “I was his secretary; I was his attendant; I was living right here [in London]; I was answering the phone when Bertolucci called or when some princes of Bhutan called. All of a sudden, it was like I was right in the center of everything. That lasted for about six months, and when he left, the whole thing just dropped into nothing and I didn’t hear from Rinpoche for more than a year. I tried to contact him; he’d ignore me.” “Do you think he likes you?” Patten asks from off camera. “Yes, this is a very good question: Does he like me . . . ?” he laughs self-consciously. And in one of the most affecting moments of the film, the camera suddenly cuts from Luc’s laughter to him again, some moments later, strangely solemn, a cinematic juxtaposition that transmits a kind of emptiness and the sense that he himself is not convinced.

Perhaps more intriguing than Dzongsar Rinpoche’s ego-challenging strategies, however, is the almost familiar sense of cynicism and isolation strikingly conveyed by Luc—so often the default state of the postmodern psyche that longs for deeper connection but is unwilling to trust. “These are the conflicting moods of our time,” young social critic Jedediah Purdy writes in *For Common Things*. “We are skeptical, ironic, and inclined to an impoverished self-reliance. At the same time, we want to give up the ironist’s jaded independence and believe that we are not alone, that we can find moral communities, clear obligations, and even miracles. We doubt the possibility of being at home in the world, yet we desire that home above all else.”

When asked to comment on his role as teacher, Dzongsar responds that the guru is “the mirror to see yourself”—to see all pride and emotional attachment as the major obstacles to enlightenment. And yet his tactics seem to compound confusion in his Western students rather than provide an incisive reflection of their own states of mind. It is difficult for them to be “at home” in the most profound sense of the term, to find perfect trust in him, and in that trust, to find nothing less than their own liberation.

In Dzongsar’s view, however, “all the faults we see in [the guru] are nothing but our own projections. . . . Whatever interpretation we make—not only about the guru, but about other people, too—it’s always coming from one’s own interpretation, one’s own expectation, one’s own fear. . . . It’s easy to blame or worship someone. But whatever you do, you are the one who is doing it.” He explains, “If your goal is [enlightenment], to see that all worldly value has no value, if you have that kind of view

and if you have that kind of aim, then a genuine teacher who breaks all this pride, crushes your pride, makes this worldly life completely miserable, is something that you ask for. . . . He is the assassin, he is the man or the woman whom you have hired to completely dismantle you.”

Indeed, this is the highly specialized function of the guru—to dissolve the ego-driven agendas of the personality that are often unconsciously obstructing the realization of a student’s highest aspirations. But in order to be “dismantled,” one must surrender and find humility, and that can be a tall order in this day and age when holding anyone in too high a regard is instinctively felt to be risky, a threat to our individualism and autonomy. In a time when so many gurus have, in fact, proven themselves to be unscrupulous, the contemporary seeker may easily fall prey to mistrust and victimization when the true teacher uses “all means necessary” to catalyze the student’s awakening. This predicament is clearly illustrated in Patten’s relationship with Dzongsar. She is captivated by him, and yet she becomes exasperated by his methods. “[Is] it him? [Is] it me?” Patten muses. “If only he were more . . . normal.”

Dzongsar invites her, Louise, and Luc to join him on a trip to Bhutan, his homeland. The three Westerners arrive in this beautiful mountainous country to discover that there, in the last of the world’s Vajrayana Buddhist kingdoms, Dzongsar Rinpoche is considered a prince among his people. As his students greet him, bowing deferentially in Tibetan fashion, he tells them, “Here I have to act as God and you have to act as if you’re nothing.” This one moment powerfully transmits the contrast between the two worlds Dzongsar inhabits—the traditional religious culture of his homeland and the freedom and individuality of the West. The multitudes of Bhutanese men, women, and children who come to see him for blessings radiate an unconditional devotion, reverence, and faith that is the very ground of their existence. (As Dzongsar observes of his Bhutanese subjects, compared with Westerners, “at least people here are happy.”) To them, he is God, unquestioningly. Amid the spiritual certainty imparted by her new surroundings, Lesley finds that “all the cynical voices in [her] head went silent.” Her relief is palpable.

Ironically, Dzongsar confesses that it is precisely because of this absolute devotion that he finds it very difficult to teach Buddhism in Bhutan. “First of all [the people] are very shy, and the fact that I’m supposedly a Rinpoche who is respected by everyone, that doesn’t help because that creates a big gap. . . . According to Buddhism, a student has to be like a patient . . . a patient must reveal everything openly without any fear, without

any inhibition. But here in Bhutan, sometimes the gap between the patient and the doctor is so high that the ordinary citizens can’t even look at [me], let alone ask questions.” It becomes apparent that total devotion in a traditional context may be as much an obstacle to a real relationship between student and teacher as are doubt and mistrust of authority in our own culture. And despite his obvious preeminence as a Buddhist master, Dzongsar Rinpoche is strangely caught between these two worlds.

In their own way, so are his Western students. “What are you devoted to?” another student asks Luc as he and Louise watch several thousand Bhutanese gather to receive Dzongsar’s blessing. “This conversation is so boring . . . who cares?” he retorts. “But what do you really think of Rinpoche’s capacity as

“The guru is the man or the woman whom you have hired to completely dismantle you.”

Dzongsar Rinpoche

a teacher to help you . . . as Luc?” she insists. “Well,” he replies, “I’m here, so I must have some sort of faith. I don’t know.” “Why do you do Buddhist practice at all?” Luc is asked. “What makes you think I do?” he answers. “I’m just here checking out the babes . . .”

“Movie sets are like the ego’s battlefield,” observes filmmaker Bernardo Bertolucci in a brief but potent interview with Patten, and while in this case the movie set is a real-life journey, Patten’s film is no exception. In fact, perhaps even more than Patten intended, it provides remarkable insight into a very particular battlefield—that place where the modern-day seeker fights for spiritual conviction and certainty in an age strikingly devoid of both. Of the three students in *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, it is Luc who best personifies the essence of this predicament: “What is the disciple-teacher relationship?” he asks himself. “It’s psychotic. . . . If [Dzongsar] is enlightened, why doesn’t he fucking act like an enlightened being?” “How does an enlightened being act?” he’s asked from off camera. “That,” he says, “is the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question.”

What is the student-teacher relationship, and how does an enlightened being act? As apparently enlightened and at home in the West as Dzongsar is, even he admits to the challenges inherent to being an Eastern teacher in a postmodern world,

where there is “relationship difficulty” and where his students doubt him and want their teacher to be like them, “to like what we like. . . . We want him to be not that special, and at the same time, he has to be slightly special.” His reflections suggest the painful separation that exists between him and his students, again illustrating the central point the film brings

“How does an enlightened being act? That’s the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question.”

Luc Dierckx

home: that the traditional Eastern model of the guru has rarely succeeded in our post-traditional, egalitarian society unmoored from hierarchy and religious authority, in which individuals are not beholden to anyone higher than them-

selves. And it has seldom been able to overcome the cynicism and doubt in seekers who, despite their spiritual aspirations, are often ill-prepared for the demands inherent to an authentic student-teacher relationship.

In one of the last scenes of the film, Patten finally seems convinced of Dzongsar’s integrity but remains unsure of her own capacity to meet it: “Rinpoche had opened a door for me, and it had led to the softness of my own heart—if I could find the courage to walk through.” In leaving us with no satisfying conclusion, *Words of My Perfect Teacher* portrays the spiritual impasse experienced by so many Westerners searching for enlightenment—and the unbridgeable chasm that often haunts the relationship between contemporary seekers and their Eastern gurus. And though she may not have consciously intended it, Patten leaves us with two unanswered questions: How are we going to transcend the complex and contradictory realms of the postmodern psyche? And in order to do so, could it be that we really do need the perfect teacher to help us bridge that divide? ■

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Ghangzhou, China. A woman shouts as she hears the verdict before being executed. April 2001. ©Reuters.

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The dilemma of an Eastern master in a postmodern world

an interview with DZONGSAR JAMYANG KHYENTSE RINPOCHE
by ANDREW COHEN

gurus



**“couldn’t
care less”**

The enlightened mentor—the guru—has throughout the ages been that great being who willingly does battle with the powerful forces of ignorance that reside in the depths of the human soul. Through his or her living presence, the guru catalyzes extraordinary transformation, guiding human beings from darkness to light, from the limitations of a small and petty existence to the free and infinite expanses of illuminated awareness. Few modern teachers are as qualified to claim the title of guru as Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, heir to a long and illustrious lineage of enlightened Buddhist masters. In this recent interview with spiritual teacher and WIE editor in chief Andrew Cohen, Dzongsar Rinpoche candidly discusses what it takes to fulfill his role as guru and explains why the greatest challenge, East or West, is to have the courage to completely disengage from public opinion and attain “a genuine indifference.”



Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

ANDREW COHEN: You are uniquely straddling two worlds: you were born a tulku and had traditional Buddhist education and training in your own culture, but you have spent a lot of time in the West and have also become a well-known filmmaker. So you seem to have one foot in the premodern world and one foot in the postmodern world. You are quite an independent thinker, forging your own path as one of the pioneers in this very interesting time of transition in the evolution and development of the dharma, of East-meets-West spirituality. So I would like to talk with you about what it means to be a guru at this point in history.

When someone takes on a guru, as is clearly illustrated in *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, it's a deep and serious engagement. And in the film, you speak very directly about the challenge that relationship poses to the ego, to the separate sense of self. The guru represents the dissolution of the ego, and yet Westerners of our generation, more often than not, don't seem to be prepared for this. And while you have said that there are many different methods for finding enlightenment, for discovering "the guru within," one of the quickest and easiest is to receive the blessings of the teacher. Why is this? What actually is the role of the guru, and why is it so vital?

DZONGSAR RINPOCHE: The reason why the guru is the most effective is because the guru is someone you are supposed to look at as being superior to a human being. But he is also someone you can relate to. A guru is someone who eats pizza, who likes the same pizza that you like. And that's quite important because at the same time that he is someone you can relate to, he is the one you have consciously or unconsciously hired to destroy yourself!

COHEN: Could you say what you mean by that?

DZONGSAR: You give up everything and then hire him to destroy your ego. And you pay him body, speech, and mind to do that.

COHEN: When you say "destroy the ego," that's not a small thing.

DZONGSAR: Yes. That's true.

COHEN: And as we were saying earlier, it seems that the destruction of the ego is an alien concept in postmodern Western culture, which is a nonreligious secular society. In fact, it seems that in postmodern culture, the ego, or the separate self-sense, has become even more powerful as a result of the cultural revolution that began in the sixties. At that time, the emphasis became freedom of the individual and freedom for the individual. And the result is that, unlike in previous times, there was no God above that one had to fear, which in the past had perhaps engendered humility, a bit of healthy fear of something higher than oneself.

So when we in the West discovered enlightenment and then found that in order to attain it, the ego, or the separate self, had to die, this was a very big shock because culturally we had no training or preparation for this whatsoever. Now in the film, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, you speak about how you hire the guru to be the assassin, the man or woman you hire to "completely dismantle you." But how does a teacher succeed in "dismantling" their students' egos in this kind of cultural milieu?

DZONGSAR: It's difficult. This is why defining ego is very important, especially within a culture that doesn't have this kind of background. And I think the classic way of defining the ego is, at the end of the day, the only solution: Ignorance—which is the same as ego—is when you're looking at two, or more than two, ever-changing transitory things, and yet you think that they're one; you think they're independent and permanent. That is ignorance and that is ego.

For instance, if I look at my hand, I make three mistakes. One, I think it's the same hand I had this morning. But that's not true; it has changed. And two, I think there's something called "hand" when there actually isn't because it's a part of a lot of things—my veins, my skin, my blood, all kinds of things.

COHEN: So the point is that there's no such thing as independent existence.

DZONGSAR: Right. And then another mistake I make is not realizing that the existence of my hand actually depends on many things. For instance, the fact that the ceiling hasn't fallen on my hand is the reason why it's moving, why it's there. But I don't think in that way. I think my hand is there because my hand is there.

COHEN: You're talking about what is called "dependent origination," the understanding that everything that exists depends upon

everything else that exists, which depends upon everything else that exists. In this, one sees that one's own self exists as part of this infinitely dependent process in which there is no one who is isolated or separate from the whole.

DZONGSAR: Yes, and all this information needs to be transmitted to one who wants to be the victim of the guru.

COHEN: In the movie, you also spoke about how the guru crushes people's pride, as the means to purify them of ego motivations and attachment.

DZONGSAR: Yes, because pride is thinking something that is not necessarily you. For instance, if I asked you, "Are you a man?" you would say, "Yes." That is confidence, not pride. Now, if I ask, "Are you a *superman*?" and you say, "Yes," that *may* be pride because "super" is only an adjective, and is not imputed. Pride, ego, and ignorance are all synonymous.

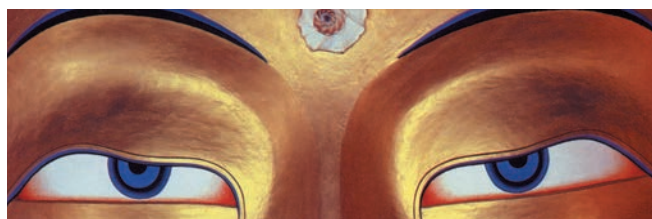
COHEN: And you said that the teacher who "crushes your pride and makes this worldly life completely miserable is something

that you ask for. He is the assassin, he is the man or woman whom you have hired to completely dismantle you."

DZONGSAR: You may not realize that's what you're doing, but that's the idea—to dismantle everything: your identity, *everything*. And it's not like dismantling one big habit. It changes. Let's say today I would like to be stroked. Then a teacher should not stroke me. Or maybe today I would like to be beaten. Then maybe I should be stroked. So that's why this is actually beyond abuse and not abuse. If somebody bites you or beats you and handcuffs you, that's a kind of abuse, isn't it? But what I'm talking about is *ultimate* abuse. At the same time, abuse phenomena only exist if you are still clinging to transitory phenomena as permanent and real. If you don't, there is nothing to be abused. But that's difficult, really difficult.

COHEN: In that case, the teacher's work would be done.

DZONGSAR: Yes, of course. But the kind of student we're talking about doesn't exist. And that kind of teacher doesn't exist, either. Teachers don't have that kind of courage.



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Dzongsar Rinpoche with his student Luc Dierckx from the film *Words of My Perfect Teacher*

I don't have it. I may be a teacher, but I don't have that kind of courage because I love my reputation. Who wants to be referred to as an abuser? I don't. I am a sycophant. I try to go along with what people think. If people think a teacher should shave his head, wear something maroon, walk gently, eat only vegetarian food, be so-called serene, then I'm very tempted to do that. Rajneesh had the guts to have ninety-three Rolls Royces. I call it guts. One Rolls Royce is one thing. Even two or three—but *ninety-three is guts!* And I don't have the guts, the confidence. I like Rajneesh very much. I like him much better than Krishnamurti. Many of his words are quite good, and I can see why the Westerners would like him.

COHEN: *Perhaps the problem with Krishnamurti was that he pretended that he wasn't a guru or a master, although he obviously was. I think this made it very difficult for people.*

DZONGSAR: Yes; it was a contradiction.

COHEN: *Are you saying, then, that you hold back with your students?*

DZONGSAR: I do, always.

COHEN: *At the same time, you said in the film that you're an assassin—that that's your job.*

DZONGSAR: Yes, in the context that if I am a student's teacher, then that is my job. But I'm not promising I can do it. You know, but I love very much the eight worldly dharmas. I'm like these police undercover cops who are sent into a Mafia family. What I'm supposed to do is *really* check out these people, but I fall in love with what they do, so I follow what they want. It's difficult. And that comes from attachment to

the eight worldly dharmas—attachment to the praise and fear of the criticism.

COHEN: *But some of the greatest Tibetan gurus have the reputation for being the most fierce, like Marpa, for example. He was the fiercest.*

DZONGSAR: Oh, yes, of course. *They* could do it because they have no agenda. Their only agenda was to enlighten. They didn't care what people said, what other people thought—I call it CCL: *couldn't-care-less-ness*. That holds the biggest power. But who has it today? No one.

COHEN: *One of the most interesting things that was revealed about you in the film was the juxtaposition of the roles you're playing. As a guru in the West, you are working with Western students who, at least in theory, are coming to you for enlightenment, and yet who come from this postmodern context where there's an inherent mistrust of authority. Whereas in Bhutan, thousands and thousands of Bhutanese people have no doubt that you are a living god.*

DZONGSAR: I think on both continents I have mastered the art of pretense. I go to Bhutan and I know what to do for them, to do what is most harmonious. Because if I act or say things in Bhutan or in Tibet that I say in the West, I'll be in trouble. Now *that* is what I was referring to before. I do this because I don't want to lose disciples; I don't want to be criticized. Of course, I can justify those actions by saying, "Oh, it's coming from a good motivation, because I don't want to jeopardize the spiritual path of hundreds of people."

COHEN: *You described in the film how it's very difficult for you to have an authentic relationship with many of your Bhutanese devotees because of the kind of admiration they have for you. But with your Western students, there is the fundamental ego position that feels that "no one is higher than me." And this also presents difficulty, because for any authentic guru to be able to help a student achieve enlightenment, there has to be the acceptance from the outset that the guru has realized something that the student has not yet realized. Then, of course, there's the tremendous pressure the teacher places on the ego and the student's identification with it. And in *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Lesley Ann Patten showed very well how many of your Western students were struggling with these very issues—with the notions of hierarchy and authority, and even with their lack of faith in the possibility of enlightenment itself.*

DZONGSAR: Yes, exactly. But in both cultures there is one thing that is similar—it's this culprit: *expectation*. In Eastern cultures, like in Bhutan, there may be blind devotion, but they

all have an expectation. In the Western culture, they may be skeptical and secular, but there's also expectation. And that expectation, while it may manifest differently, fundamentally has only one nature and that is that everybody wants to be happy. *And that is where things go wrong.*

To be a Buddhist and to be practicing dharma have *nothing* to do with being happy. If you're practicing the dharma to be happy, then it's like you're doing the opposite, *just* the opposite. Enlightenment has *nothing* to do with happiness or unhappiness. And both cultures come to me to be happy. That *really* is the source of all the misunderstanding.

COHEN: *Yes. The goal is to be free from both happiness and unhappiness.*

DZONGSAR: Yes, and I have to teach them what to expect. But it's really difficult.

COHEN: *The fact that you are in these two different cultures seems to make it challenging for you to be simply and authentically yourself. Because on the one hand, in Bhutan, there is a certain*

role you need to assume, which you've accepted—that's your dharma, your destiny. But there are restrictions associated with that premodern context. And in the West, because of the postmodern secular context, there are also restrictions. So your own capacity to just be fully and spontaneously yourself, even as a teacher or as a guru, must be inhibited in both cases. Could you speak a little bit about this?

DZONGSAR: This is a very good question. It all goes to tell me that the bottom line is that I need to develop my courage, the courage to learn CCL—"couldn't-care-less-ness." In the morning, with a little bit of good motivation, I can start teaching. That will accumulate some merit, I'm sure. At least I'm not going around teaching people to blow themselves up or kill infidels. And even teaching I only do when I'm in a spiritual mood. But my job now, my duty is to first develop my "couldn't-care-less-ness." The bottom line is that I need to learn that; I need to achieve that. Then, even if I receive bad publicity in the West, I couldn't care less. Once I achieve that, then I'll reach a certain level where real genuine compassion is. Until then, everything is a bit deceptive. ■

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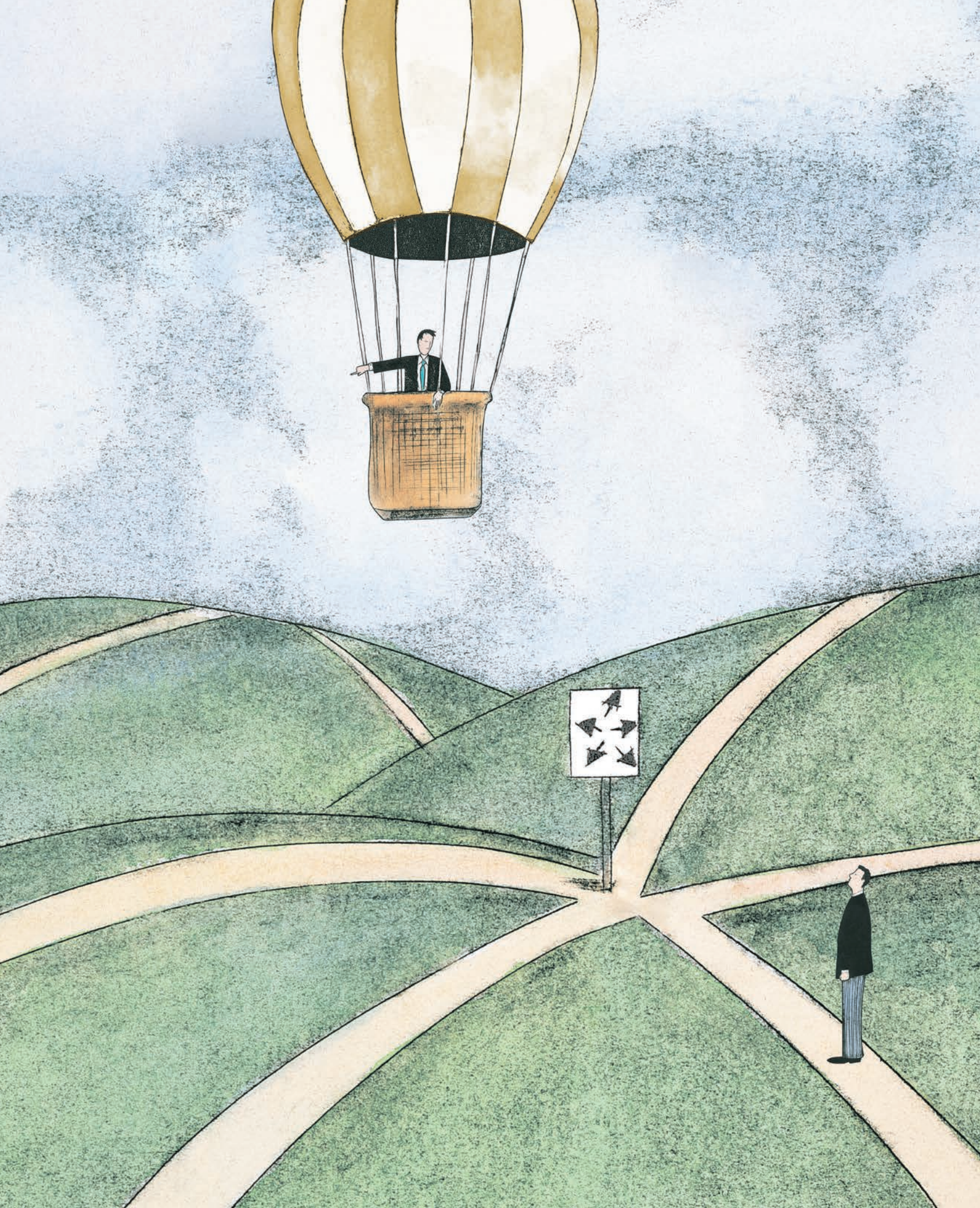
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MORAL HIERARCHY

THE KEY TO EVOLVING CONSCIOUSNESS

by Jason D. Hill

I believe that it is time to revisit the notion of hierarchy. The time has come for us not only to call for its return, but to reconstruct and articulate a new understanding of it—one that is indispensable for the evolution of consciousness.

Hierarchy has several definitions, among which is: a classification of a group of people according to ability or economic, social, or professional standing. Hierarchical relationships have through millennia fostered asymmetrical relationships—between men and women, whites and people of color, and those from different socioeconomic classes—that compromised human dignity. In our contemporary society there are functional vestiges of premodern modes of existence that undermine basic freedoms and rights. Gender apartheid is practiced in many nation-states, as are ethnocentrism, racism, nationalism, and religious prejudice. They are crucial reminders that the consequences of applied hierarchy continue to thrive in spite of the moral progress we have achieved as a species.

For these reasons, hierarchy as a governing principle of human relations is, today, regarded by some moral progressives as antiquated, regressive, and outright pernicious. Moral progressives are concerned primarily about basic rights and liberties that are the linchpin of contemporary life, and are rightfully wary of any defense

of an unqualified notion of hierarchy. These rights emerge out of the tradition of political liberalism and representative democracy. We may refer to these rights and freedoms as the “dignities of modernity.”

These dignities guarantee that all persons have *intrinsic equal moral value* as human beings regardless of their standing in life. They secure the sanctity of human existence. These dignities include *freedom*—the right to create a conception of the good and of the good life for oneself apart from the conceptions held by those in one’s immediate culture. This freedom is safeguarded by a set of inviolable liberties of which the state may not arbitrarily deprive one.

This freedom, in turn, secures a moral principle on which modern selfhood rests: *autonomy*. Autonomy can only be assured if a key feature of modernity is recognized: *equality*. Equality here means equality before the law. The law ought not

They fear being ensnared by the restrictive protocols of hierarchy and the containment of our subjectivity and growth that come when our humanity is tied to inflexible protocols. And yet, the indiscriminate abandonment of hierarchy has given rise to hubris, narcissism, and a pervasive view that all truth claims, all modes of existence, and all engagements with the world, are equal. And it has prevented us from looking at what a principled form of hierarchy achieves.

I believe we must revisit the notion of hierarchy, and redefine it so that it has at its core a moral principle. I will refer to this as *moral hierarchy*.

I would define *moral hierarchy* as a reciprocal relationship between two or more persons in which the moral axioms of dignity, sovereignty, and personal autonomy are held by all parties involved. Further, relationships governed by moral hierarchy are entered into *voluntarily*. One therefore accepts the hierarchical terms of moral engagement as binding, because one has accepted that the relationship is a precondition for one’s continued advanced socialization in the world and the evolution of consciousness.

I want to use the notion of the spiritual teacher as a working

example to expand on the virtues of hierarchy. In contemporary parlance, we may call this the guru–spiritual seeker alignment.

We may divide the persons who embody the moral hierarchy principle into two camps. The submissive, or the student, we may refer to as the *hierarchee* and the teacher, or the qualified superior, as the *hierarcher*.

THE HIERARCHEE

One who recognizes a superior is engaged in an act of faith and trust. He or she functions from judgments that are both cognitive and visceral—cognitive because one sees in reason the necessity for moral and spiritual emulation. One knows that one cannot be the source of all of the knowledge that one needs to matriculate successfully in life. One carefully evaluates the hierarcher before whom one surrenders.

Judgments proceed viscerally also. One senses the spirit within; the spirit that harbors the lessons, the insight, the wisdom, or perhaps nothing other than another’s sacred and

I open myself as a canvas on which you may inscribe your wisdom . . .

to discriminate against anyone for aspects of their identity that are morally neutral: class, gender, race, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. Even those who transgress moral boundaries and break laws are regarded as having the right to equal treatment before the law. This right is shored up by another moral edict bequeathed to us by the ancient stoics and all great religious systems: the inviolable intrinsic moral value of human life and dignity that resides in all persons.

Ultimately, the dignities that gloriously culminated in the period of the Enlightenment coalesced into a single concept, which, when achieved by individuals, can be the basis of much that is adjudged laudatory and beautiful in the human: the concept of *personal identity*. The possession of personal identity is an unprecedented achievement of the modern world. It emancipated one from what was historically known as *role identity*, which was tied to a specific and largely unalterable social role.

As a result, those who oppose a return to hierarchy as we have known and witnessed it have legitimate cause for concern.

evolved consciousness. No words are spoken. No thoughts revealed. One knows through the deepest part of one's intuitive, nonreflexive being the presence of the authentic and the genuine. The need to hand oneself over to a superior is deep and stems from the moral epicenter of one's soul.

This act is greater than passive submission, however. It is a form of radical intersubjectivity. It is freedom granted to oneself to be deeply touched by another, and to allow the spontaneous gestures and responses that blossom from the encounter to shape a new identity. Such an act might resist the terminologies and labels of the social world. Still, it corresponds to the psychological and moral terrain of one's inner life.

This is the gift-giving feature of our humanity that we own. It is not dependent on the kind of political society in which we live. This gift-giving feature is the humble capacity to genuflect before the other in a spirit of reciprocity, in respectful brotherhood and sisterhood, and say: *I am not so complete that I can resist handing over to you some part of my continued socialization and identity formation as a human being. With you, my friend, my humanity, regardless of its origins, continues to expand and will take me to places I could never have imagined.*

This gift-giving impulse is part of how we organically make values as human beings. It is what I would call creative social intercourse. And that gives birth to applied creative moral agency.

When in the presence of a moral hierarcher I feel the presence of godhead. A clear spirit of discernment allows me to properly perceive a genuine hierarcher from a charlatan and, perhaps more importantly, my own yearning for evolving consciousness from the infantile need for a person to simply fill a void inside of me.

The willingness to submit one's humanity to another is possible only in a morally ordered and principled hierarchical system of relations in which each recognizes the indispensable offerings and value of the other. One says in the genuflection: *We share a humanity, and in the spaces of that sacred humanity something of the divine is achieved. I open myself as a canvas on which you may inscribe your wisdom, teachings, and generosity and share your enlightenment—or whatever seeds of it you may have discovered in your own soul.*

The openness of the submissive is an act of enlightened humility. Enlightened because one knows that one is unable

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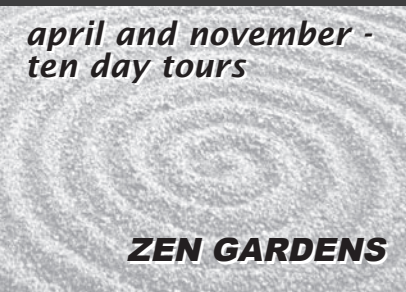
* Hans Reiss, *Kant: Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, "Idea for a Universal History," p. 42.

Kant goes on to say that each individual would have to live for a very long time if he were to make use of all his natural capacities. Because of the short, finite nature of human life, it will require a long period of time and several generations of human beings passing on their enlightenment to successors "before the germs implanted by nature in our species can be developed to that degree which corresponds to nature's original intention." According to Kant, this intention is to turn human beings from natural creatures—creatures (literally) without a moral personality—into moral individuals.

Nature does not allocate the means for evolutionary consciousness arbitrarily. The mechanisms are acquired by several means. One thing that is clear, though, is that careful attention to the hierarchical steps involved in achieving this divine birthright of ours is a prerequisite for attaining even a speck of it. The paradox is a tricky one: Acknowledging the equal moral and intrinsic value of each person while eschewing the radical, indiscriminate language of egalitarianism. Failure to do the latter results in cognitive hubris or *inactive spectatorship*, where we simply witness the spiritual and evolutionary work of those laboring on behalf of humanity while failing to be a submissive participant in its organic process.

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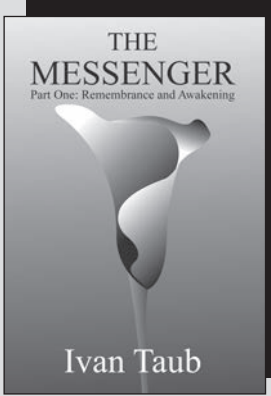
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Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said: “God is the Great Beyond in the midst of us.”

I have pondered this statement often, marveling at the hopefulness and the feeling of incredible excitement it engenders as I wake each morning wondering how much closer I am in this journey to nearing the God inside myself. How is it that some people are closer to this Great Beyond than others? Do they live a life of piety? Are they the beneficiaries of *awesome* and *phenomenal* experiences that forever changed their lives in ways not susceptible to linear conceptual explications? Were they jolted by an act of grace and catapulted into a realm that made them instantly aware of being in closer proximity to the divine? If so, how can I get there?

The capacity to sustain deep yearning in the absence of answers occurs while remaining a supplicant. One surrenders to the call of a force, part of whose response lies in the humanity of another. This is not veiled masochism (although it can be that). Rather, it is a moral obligation to awaken the godhead that one senses but perhaps lacks the excavational tools to unearth.

THE HIERARCHER

He or she has the tools. By dint of grace, by insight forged through devotional meditation, or by the transformative powers of suffering and redemption—in whatever way the hierarcher has come to possess his gift, he embodies the moral

us solace from the burden of that which we are intermittently driven to seek: our raw, naked *singularity*. Our singularity terrifies us. It is not the same as individuality, which we often conflate with the type of music we like, the values and principles we self-righteously cling to, or our deepest sense of self-image. Singularity is the embodiment of our entire being—down to the smallest cellular and microscopic aspect of our corporeal bodies—as well as the nonsubstantive immaterial spirit that is both contained in and outside our bodies.

Our singularity terrifies us because we know that there is no other like it. To live a life faithful to its architectural spirit, to live in accordance with the demands of its identity (which is singularly our own but has a share in a greater singularity—The One—from which our indubitable version derives its imprint) is to live a life alone in the midst of others.

The moral hierarcher as spiritual teacher is like the brave bodhisattva reconciling us to this blessed aloneness by pointing a path toward our own singularity. He is our guide, constant companion, and stern enforcer of the *not-this-way* ethos that shapes our unfolding. I would place special emphasis on the not-this-way approach rather than, say, a deliberative, ubiquitous salvific path. This is what conventional religion, New Age spirituality, and traditional socialization methods offer. Arguably, an efficient and civil society needs such methods of character formation. The moral hierarcher, however, is actually respectfully disdainful of moral character formation

that does not simultaneously empower the individual to locate spirit and free the embryonic God buried inside our souls. People who are “stuck up” are people who are stuck on themselves. They are persons unable to get outside their own skins and characters. The

moral hierarcher, therefore, is one who aids in a disassembling of character and is not and cannot be a traditional friend. All great moral hierarchers from Christ to Muhammad, from Buddha to Gandhi, enraged, upset, and wreaked havoc on the “nervous systems” of those they were driven to free by sharing their own exalted humanity.

This point must be emphasized in a discussion of moral hierarchy. There is, in our postmodern age of rampant narcissism and solipsism—when many are reluctant to subject their own private truth claims to validity tests—a tendency to “cuddle,” in the name of sensitivity, the “private opinions,” the “this is just me” coda, of individuals. We fail to recognize that this approach, far from safeguarding dignity, is a violation of dignity in the deepest sense of that term. This “cuddling” is not

The moral hierarcher as spiritual teacher is like the brave bodhisattva reconciling us to this blessed aloneness.

hierarchy principle. His moral center of gravity is a seat of compassion and humble gratitude for the blessings of being a high-order being. The hierarcher as the embodiment of the moral hierarchy principle has a sacred responsibility. He is driven by a burning desire to evoke the discovery of the God that exists in the Great Beyond in us, which is to evacuate the self of its twisted inner logics, justifications, rationalizations, and obsessions.

Noble spiritual cartographers that they are, moral hierarchers relieve us of the need to play hide-and-seek with ourselves. At various times in meditative reflection, I find myself asking: “Why are you playing hide-and-seek with yourself?” “Why do those you know intimately play such games?” The answer, I believe, is that we play this game because the hiding grants

mere condescension; it is not just allowing people to remain rooted in intransigent infantile impulses that are later codified into a deceptive facsimile of an authentic character. Yes, character formation is a precondition for discovering the God that is the Great Beyond in all of us. But this form of “cuddling” aids and abets the process of *human devolution*: the systematic process of declining from a higher to a lower level of effective power or vitality or essential quality.

Much has already been written on the ways in which an ego-obsessed mindset is inimical to evolutionary consciousness. What the moral hierarcher accomplishes, however, is a disciplinary methodology that is uncompromising, inflexible, and non-exception-making in its application. This last bit has to be stressed even more fully. When we deal with the material realm of human development, we are flexible, provisional, and adaptive. Since we are not infallible as finite corporeal beings, we learn through reason, observation, trial and error, and abstraction the ways and byways of surviving physically. The moral hierarcher as spiritual teacher, however, is ultimately dealing with the immaterial as he engages us in the path toward evolutionary consciousness. Ultimately, to compromise would be to act as if the God in the Great Beyond in all of us

exists as a different God in the corporeal house of each. This is the difference between New Age spirituality and an authentic guide toward evolutionary consciousness. Unassailable dignity is the location of one’s singularity. In that inviolate space resides the God in the Great Beyond.

This is the paradox. This is the mystery to be contemplated. And this is the eternal gift of the moral hierarcher as spiritual teacher: *The discovery and practice of singularity requires an unbreachable uniformity and implacable non-compromise.* ■



Jason D. Hill, PhD, is an associate professor of philosophy at DePaul University and was a 1999-2000 Society for the Humanities Fellow at Cornell University. He is the author of *Becoming a Cosmopolitan: What It Means to Be a Human Being in the New Millennium* and is currently writing a book on the subject of moral hierarchy.

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the transmission of CONSCIOUSNESS

REVIVING THE ROLE OF THE SPIRITUAL MASTER

an interview with **Dr. Dario Salas Sommer**

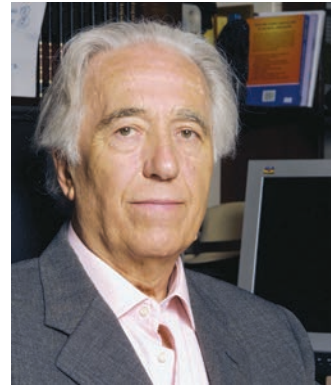
by **Jessica Roemischer**

In our cultural milieu, the traditional model of the teacher-disciple relationship is, for many, a relic from the past. Indeed, postmodernity has fought hard to wrench itself free from the strictures of religion and religious authority. In a time of unprecedented personal freedom, even those who are drawn to a spiritual life can find it difficult to imagine being beholden to *anyone*. So it is rare to find someone, particularly from the contemporary West, whose life and work express the conviction that in order to fully realize our human potential, we must yield to another to guide us and enter into the classic definition of *discipleship*.

That doubtless conviction comes from philosopher, spiritual teacher, and author Dr. Dario Salas Sommer. Salas, who has published eight books under the pseudonym John Baines, is a strikingly passionate advocate for the teacher-student relationship. He has rekindled a mystical teaching known as Hermeticism, which first emerged in the temples of ancient Greece and has been conveyed from one generation to the next by living transmission from master to disciple. Practiced and preserved over the millennia in the inner sanctums of secret societies, Hermeticism has inspired many of the West's mystery schools, including Rosicrucianism,

Freemasonry, and Theosophy, and Salas has revived the essence of this teaching for a postmodern age.

A legendary figure in his native South America, Salas is becoming more widely known throughout the world. The director of the Institute of Hermetic Philosophy, which he founded in 1961, and which has centers on three continents, he is engaged with an expanding international body of students located in North and South America, Europe, and Russia. As the guiding inspiration to his students and thousands of others worldwide, he upholds the perennial goal of the spiritual life—"moral and spiritual elevation"—and affirms the only means by which, he believes, it can be attained: an authentic relationship between student and teacher.



WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT: *In many religious traditions, the spiritual teacher was considered essential to transformation. But today, in an age of heightened individualism, you are a rare voice defending the classic tradition of the teacher-student relationship. Can you speak about the role of the teacher on the spiritual path and why it continues to be so essential?*

DARIO SALAS SOMMER: There are two kinds of relationships between the master and disciple. There's one where the master gives the disciple information he or she will use to improve his or her life. But there is another kind of relationship where

poison in it, and the other doesn't. If your intentions are pure, your spirit will guide you to choose the correct glass without the poison." If the candidate doubted his own intentions, he was free to go. Otherwise, he'd choose a glass and drink it. Naturally, they had the antidote waiting in case he drank the poison. In that initiation, the master would transmit something to the person that would start a fermentation process within the student's soul. And that transmission gave the student motivation, enthusiasm, and strength and initiated the student on the path.

WIE: *Many today claim that we no longer need the teacher and that we can transform our consciousness on our own.*

SALAS: First of all, we have to ask who it is that is expressing that opinion. In the New Age movement, there's too much esoteric information available, and people develop fantasies that spiritual transformation is easy. But the great difficulty has to do with ego. The ego defends itself. It has its own "program." Within that program is something like a file, and that file is on self-

defense. So, is the opinion that we no longer need a teacher being held by the *spirit* of a person or by the *program* of that person? I think it's the program defending itself. It's vanity, it's pride, it's an excessive feeling of self-importance.

It's only possible to advance on the spiritual path if we lose our self-importance, because personal importance blinds us. We can't see reality. We don't value other people's opinions because all we do is look at our own image, and this is the basis of narcissism. We only listen when the other person agrees with us. Narcissism damages the possibility of spiritual evolution because narcissists always think they're right. They don't listen to other people's points of view. Narcissism strengthens the ego; humility, on the other hand, is the opposite of narcissistic self-importance.

In the New Age movement, there's too much esoteric information available, and people develop fantasies that spiritual transformation is easy.

the master gives part of his own consciousness to the disciple. Through the consciousness of the master, students can become enlightened because they now have the parameters within them for what is real and what is false, and by that I'm talking about levels of reality—a *deeper* reality. Naturally, in the world there are many masters, but they work on different levels. And I believe the highest expression of the student-teacher relationship takes the form of this transmission of the master's consciousness.

In the traditions of the past, initiation ceremonies were carried out in the temples, and these were extremely serious. When a candidate for initiation came up, they would ask him if his intentions were pure, and if he said yes, they would give him two glasses of wine. They'd say, "One of these glasses has

WIE: So you're saying that a teacher is, in fact, required to bring about spiritual transformation.

SALAS: Yes. How can a machine stop being a machine by itself? It's impossible. How can a computer switch on and change its own program? How can a computer modify its own hard disk? There may be good intention, which is respectable, but it doesn't lead you to anything practical. Human beings can't see themselves. A person has a blind spot for their own mind; they can't see their own defects.

Let's relate this to entropy. Entropy is what is easy. When a rock is falling, it's entropy. Can the rock get back to the top of the mountain by itself? It can't. And spiritual evolution is like climbing Mount Olympus. I'm convinced that it's very difficult for a person to change by themselves unless they have a catastrophe in their own life that produces an emotional catharsis—where they're about to die and agonizing on their deathbed, or something like that. We need someone on the outside to look at us and tell us what is happening to us, a guide who's already gone up that path and who knows

what the temptations are, where the enemies are, and what you have to do to avoid them.

WIE: What is the student's responsibility in this process?

SALAS: I want to caution those who think that being directed by a spiritual master means to encounter a fountain of wisdom and spiritual help without giving anything in return. For the student, spirituality doesn't address itself to his or her capriciousness or whims. If a student has ten defects, he will need to overcome these defects to perfect himself spiritually. God is not going to forgive that person his defects; nobody is going to wipe them away. A student has to conquer them, overcome them. When an Olympic athlete wants to run a hundred meters and be the champion, it doesn't matter if he's a believer or a nonbeliever. It doesn't matter if he prays or if he doesn't pray. What really matters is the physical training, the willpower he has, the discipline he has, the emotions he has, his internal strength. And as he does this, he proves to himself that things work in a certain way according to scientific paradigms and not

Con•scious•ness

Pronunciation: (kon'shus-nis) — *noun*

1. the attribute of life having the power of receiving impressions from outside stimuli, and the power to respond thereto;
2. awareness

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according to his whims. And through his own life, he's able to acquire faith and profound conviction and create the energy necessary to evolve.

WIE: *Can you speak about some of the temptations and obstacles one may encounter on the path?*

SALAS: They say that a teacher does his work *because* there are temptations on our path. If there was no temptation, people wouldn't sin. If there was no sin, the teacher would be without a job. If the only thing that existed in the world was goodness, we would be like sheep that do not evolve. Temptations exist for a reason. They lead us to hell, and we can only go to heaven by overcoming and conquering the temptations that are put in front of us.

We might ask ourselves, "Why did God make this so difficult for us?" And the answer is that if we didn't have a body, we wouldn't be in sin; we would be in paradise, but we wouldn't know what life on earth was like. You can't evolve when you're in heaven. You can only evolve if you have a physical body. Through the physical body, you can create the necessary energy that you need to be able to evolve and make your spirit grow. The body is continuously seeking for its own balance its own homeostasis, but if it arrived at that perfect balance, it would die—as soon as balance occurred, it would be in a static equilibrium and that would be equivalent to death. The same thing happens within the universe, and this is the reason for the eternal struggle between good and evil, which illustrates the perfect wisdom of the energy that created the universe. With regard to human beings, we have to conquer evil to be able to evolve and become more spiritual. So absolute evil is everything that stops the human being from evolving, everything that keeps him in a state of hypnosis. That which is good, from an absolute point of view, is everything that helps a human being to awaken.

WIE: *Can you explain further how this applies to the pursuit of a spiritual path?*

SALAS: The student has to choose between good and evil for themselves. We choose badly when we choose the dark forces, which are opposed to our light side and which enjoy putting obstacles in front of us. They will tempt us to leave the spiritual path, and we may choose to run away. A person's light side, however, will choose to remain on the path. And yet, when a student has created a good amount of light within themselves, that's when the dark forces are going to attack that person even more strongly. As time goes by, a person will have to face even greater challenges and difficulties. Not physically,

but through the person's passion, through their emotions and their thoughts. They're going to be tempted to lose faith. The path gets more difficult and the problems become greater. It's very similar to what happens to someone who takes on bodybuilding. They start working out with small weights, and as time goes by, they need to use heavier and heavier weights. The same thing happens on the spiritual path.

WIE: *So no matter what a teacher offers the student, it's ultimately up to that student to choose for the light.*

SALAS: Yes, and in trying to guide his students, a spiritual master confronts this difficulty. There's a cosmic law that says that you can't *make* someone evolve—you can't pressure them in any way at all. Our personality is very strong, and we're not conscious beings. We're mechanical beings, and our consciousness has to be developed. But as mechanical beings, the ego feels that it's being threatened to death by the master.

So when someone enters the spiritual path and finds a master, they're often going to be faced with a problem. They come to the master and say, "I want to change. I want to evolve. I want to be spiritual. I'm tired of myself." The master says, "Then do this." And the student replies, "Yes, I understand that clearly," and starts off with a great deal of enthusiasm. But as time goes on, the mechanisms that defend the ego start to work. Gradually, the student begins to believe that what the master says to him is not quite right. The student believes that the master is being abusive. And as a result of these defense mechanisms of the ego, he or she may leave the spiritual path. The student may begin to have aggressive feelings and thoughts toward the master. What happens most frequently is that the student runs away, they leave. And at that moment, the ego causes tremendous anguish, because the person divides into two: a part that really does desire to be on the spiritual path and a dark side that feels that the spiritual path is a death threat, and that closes the path for that person. But the spiritual state a disciple experiences while following this path is so different, so sublime, that once the student has gone beyond a certain limit, he or she will not be the same as before, even if they leave the path. One who has tasted it is eternally bound to it.

WIE: *Can you describe what occurs if the student does choose to stay on the path?*

SALAS: In the end, all initiation represents a struggle between good and evil, between the blind, bestial, and destructive force of the disciple and the intelligent consciousness of the guide. This is why the disciple must obey the teacher's will. Milarepa was

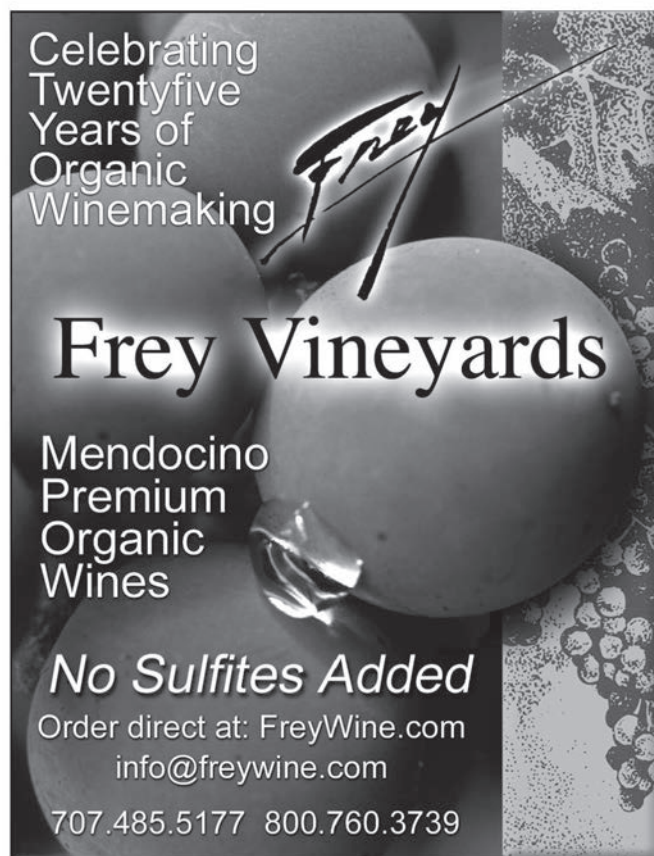
Once the student has gone beyond a certain limit, he or she will not be the same as before, even if they leave the path. One who has tasted it is eternally bound to it.

one of those great masters who said that people cannot evolve unless they hand over their will. This was practiced in ancient times, but it is not practiced today. At the same time, if a student *does* actually hand over his or her will, then the master becomes responsible for that person's life. In fact, that's the worst possibility for a master. It's as if you will yourself to become infected with AIDS; *nobody* would do that. Because, in helping the student to change, the master is taking on the karma of the student—they are changing that person's destiny. I'm not talking about destiny in terms of astrology, but the destiny created as a result of all the actions a person has taken in his or her life. The actions that a person has committed in the past define the person's destiny up to the present moment, and those actions also define what's going to happen in the future.

It's very easy to predict somebody's future without a crystal ball. You just need to know what the main mechanism is for that person and you can guess what's going to happen in their immediate future. So when a spiritual master changes the life of a person, he becomes responsible for that person's life; he is changing that person's life, and in that he is altering life itself.

WIE: *The kind of teacher-student relationship you're describing has mostly been relegated to our spiritual past, at least in Western culture. Is it really possible for this kind of relationship to exist in our twenty-first-century world?*

SALAS: The world is undergoing a crucial period, and we are in desperate need of just, strong, wholehearted, and



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GURDJIEFF'S LEGACY IS THE THIRD VIDEO in the trilogy *The Life & Significance of George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff*. Each of the three videos won the Gold Award for Biography at WorldFest, one of the oldest and most prestigious international film festivals. Past first-time winners at WorldFest include such directors as George Lucas, David Lynch, Oliver Stone, Ang Lee and Steven Spielberg.

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Milarepa was one of those great masters who said that people cannot evolve unless they hand over their will. This was practiced in ancient times but is not practiced today.

upright human beings imbued with the ideals of peace, love, abundance, and good for all mankind. To achieve this, each human being has the inescapable obligation to seek moral and spiritual elevation and thus contribute to world peace. And the one who yearns for this must contribute with his own love for humanity. But there exists only one path, and that is to enter into contact with an authentic spiritual guide who will lead the aspirant by the hand along the steep and arduous path, who will be a pillar of support without which he may never successfully overcome the obstacles that are placed in his way.

This process is the rebirth of the human being—a complete regeneration through the vehicle of consciousness. It is freedom from fate, chance, ignorance, vanity, and pain, and one who has accomplished this and is fully conscious of his human duties starts a crusade of impersonal help to humanity. The goal is cooperation toward universal peace, and to give others an opportunity to acquire the same knowledge he or she has received. In this way, a great universal chain is formed whose origin is lost in antiquity and whose existence will never end, because there can be no more sublime power than that of an individual who becomes the complete master of his soul. ■

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Nor is the Plan imposed upon humanity, for it presupposes human *free will*. As the paleontologist-priest Teilhard de Chardin has said, the time has come when humanity can consciously work together with the forces of evolution.

There is a Plan: Cooperation of Humanity with the Spiritual Hierarchy (a compilation from the writings of Alice A. Bailey) is available free from:

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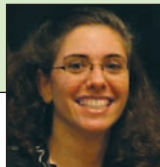
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Tom Callos, Ultimate Black Belt Test Master Instructor



THE ULTIMATE BLACK BELT TEST

At a time when the gospel of self-acceptance is leading to ever-lowering expectations, an audacious martial arts training program strives to replace mediocrity with mastery

by Ross Robertson

All too often in our postmodern world, traditional character virtues like humility, integrity, and self-discipline have given way to self-acceptance, self-importance, and self-indulgence. In some quarters, where judgment is a sin and personal affirmation is a human right, many find even the idea of seeking victory over mediocrity (our own) to be not merely antiquated but emotionally hurtful and maybe even psychologically dangerous.

Not Tom Callos, sixth-degree black belt and creator of the Ultimate Black Belt Test. Not the ninety-odd men and women, from fourteen-year-old Joel Snyder to sixty-five-year-old Dave McNeill, who have signed up for this grueling two-year teacher-training program designed to revitalize and revolutionize the martial arts world. For Callos and his students, all of whom are already black belts and most of whom own their own schools across the country, complacency is the enemy of excellence and life is a relentless call to go beyond limits. "Learning from masters and striving to master ourselves . . ." muses Gary Khoury, of Khoury's Karate Academy in Tewksbury, Massachusetts.

"This is not a test. This is my opportunity to be fully integrated, fully alive."

The UBBT is not for the faint of heart. Minimum requirements include 52,000 push-ups, 52,000 crunches, 1,000 rounds of sparring, 1,000 repetitions of a chosen form (kata), 1,000 miles of walking or running, 150 hours of jiu-jitsu mat time, a weeklong eco-adventure course, and proficiency in multiple arts, including boxing, Filipino "stick-fighting," and reality-based self-defense. But the test doesn't stop with physical skills. Students are also expected to mend three relationships gone bad; right three wrongs; practice meditation daily; seek out a master outside the martial arts; name and profile ten living heroes; perform 1,000 acts of kindness and respect and catalyze 50,000 acts through their students and community; keep a weekly journal chronicling gains and losses, frustrations and victories; spend an entire day blind, one day mute, and one day living in a wheelchair; read twelve books on management, philosophy, or enlightenment; complete an Anthony Robbins

motivational course and Bill Phillips' *Body for Life* program; and participate in or spearhead an environmental cleanup project.

"With the Ultimate Black Belt Test," says Callos, forty-six, of Placerville, California, "I thought we could mobilize a small army"—an integral army of modern-day warriors equipped with a modern-day warrior code for transforming not only themselves but also their schools, students, and communities. "What if we collectively did a billion acts of kindness over the next ten years?" Callos asks. "What if a million martial arts students and instructors became their own Desmond Tutus, Nelson Mandelas, or Martin Luther Kings?" For the UBBT's growing cadre of leaders, that is a vision that inspires personal confrontation with the demons of weakness, inertia, and normality, because it's a vision that demands living examples in order to make it real.



Coach Tom Callos

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT: *What is the Ultimate Black Belt Test?*

TOM CALLOS: The Ultimate Black Belt Test is a hero's journey—exodus, epiphany, and return—and passing it requires a physical, mental, and spiritual transformation that will make people stand up and take notice. Preparing for and taking a black belt test should be like preparing for the Olympic Games: win or lose, you are shaped by it. You go for it, full out. You hold yourself to the highest standards. You step out on the line and reach for a sliver of perfection.

In modern times, the standards for black belt testing are all over the board, so I decided to establish a universal standard that would make the black belt mean something again. It has little to do with physical technique, because it embraces all styles from Japanese to Okinawan to Korean to Brazilian.

To me, being a black belt is more than a physical experience. Yes, a black belt should be able to execute precise, effective, beautiful, and technically proficient martial arts techniques, whatever the style. But just as importantly, a black belt should be able to execute *precise and beautiful ideas*, equal to or better than their physical techniques. A black belt should have an attitude equal in its brilliance to his or her physical skills. What makes a master is not physical skill alone but mental clarity, emotional maturity, and spiritual awareness.


WIE: *You quote Master Gichin Funakoshi, who created Shotokan karate close to a hundred years ago, as saying, "The ultimate aim of karate lies not in victory or defeat but in the perfection of the character of its participants."*

CALLOS: Yes. There's a lot of philosophy in the tradition, but the concepts have no power unless you practice them. There's a famous story where a woman came up to Gandhi and asked him to talk to her son about eating sugar. "Okay," Gandhi said, "let me talk to him next week." So she brings him back the next week, and Gandhi explains that sugar isn't good for him and asks him to cut back. Afterwards, the mom asks Gandhi, "Why couldn't you have told him that last week?" And he says, "Well, I had to stop eating sugar."

So it's all about walking the talk. Respect, for example, which we often teach kids, is something that's intangible. It has no meaning as a concept. Until it's turned into action, it's not real. The same thing goes for teachers. If you're walking the talk and seeking mastery and living the spiritual life, you'll attract students. One of my favorite sayings is "When the student is ready, the teacher appears." And when the teacher is ready, the *students* appear.

WIE: *Why do you feel that it's so important to consistently go beyond limits?*

CALLOS: The essence of the martial arts is about applying yourself at a very high level, *very* efficiently, with maximum



*Testing your limits is like a muscle—
if you don't use it, it atrophies.*

results. So when we talk about limits, I automatically say, “Well, whose limits?” We arbitrarily set limits for ourselves—mentally, physically, and emotionally—based on who we’re hanging out with and who we’re comparing ourselves to. When I think of Rosa Parks or Julia Butterfly Hill or anybody who’s out there pushing the envelope a little bit, I think, “What about *their* limits? Am I comparing myself to the wrong people?” We’re all capable of so much more than we apply ourselves to, but in order to actualize that potential, we have to constantly test our limits. Testing your limits is like a muscle—if you don’t use it, it atrophies.

WIE: *In the Ultimate Black Belt Test, you elevate this principle to the level of an unbreakable law by stating, “This test is about overcoming obstacles, not giving in to them. There are no refunds... so see it through or don’t enroll.”*

CALLOS: I think it was Henry Firestone who said, “Give me one person with commitment versus a thousand with just an interest.” So when you sign up for the test, you make a public commitment. You go to all your students and say, “I’m getting involved in this program, and at some point, I’m going to completely hit the wall. I’m going to break my leg; someone’s going to die; I’m going to have a birth. God knows what it is, but I know that something bad is going to happen. It always does. And when that happens, watch what I do.”

Your job as a teacher is to show your students, through this journey you’re taking yourself, how to be the ultimate student. Typically, people don’t set good goals for themselves that are challenging but obtainable, that excite them, and that are about things that they’re interested in. They don’t surround themselves with people who are motivated and support them in a positive way.

The martial arts dojo provides a positive environment where we can practice those things that we want to be good at—where we can turn them into action. When you bow, it’s a physical manifestation of respect. It’s not just the idea. When you use control, you’re actually practicing

self-discipline through action. Unfortunately, they don’t teach these kinds of things outside the martial arts, unless you’ve got an incredible coach like John Wooden or Vince Lombardi, who were masters in their own right. We don’t take the opportunity to teach about perseverance and honor and respect. They’re not talking about it in the classroom at school. How many times on TV do you hear the word “self-discipline” or “respect” or “honor”? And parents—who listens to their parents?

WIE: *In any practice, physical or spiritual, some would be reluctant to yield their freedom—for example the freedom to decide for themselves what they are and aren’t comfortable with—to a hierarchical teaching structure. In order to achieve mastery, why do you feel it’s necessary to submit yourself to a master or mentor?*

CALLOS: My instructor’s name is Ernie Reyes, Sr., and I’ve known him for twenty-five years. We’ve traveled together; we’ve slept in the same bed; we’ve eaten off the same plate. We’ve been as close as you can be without being mates. But I never call him “Ernie”—he’s always “Master.” In Korean, we use the word “Kwan Ja Nim,” which means “Master Instructor, Sir.” I call him Kwan Ja Nim Ernie because I don’t need another Ernie in my life. Ernie can’t get me to do what my Master Instructor can get me to do. My friends can’t get me to do what this guy can get me to do.

You need somebody in your life who when they speak, you’ll listen. When you’re troubled, when you’re having a spiritual crisis, you need to find that person who you respect enough to listen to. That relationship between junior and senior is one of the best things about Eastern culture. It doesn’t have to be a martial arts instructor. It could be anybody who has fought the internal battle that is needed to come from a centered place and give decent advice. In this sense, maybe the martial arts teacher replaces some of the structure of the community that we’ve lost—the village wise man or the shaman who people went to for advice when they wouldn’t listen to anybody else.

WIE: *So it's precisely the hierarchy in your relationship with your teacher that creates a field of respect and honor and humility—a field that wouldn't be there if he was just Ernie?*

CALLOS: That's right. And that's an Asian concept. I don't think I would have had that experience if I hadn't been in the martial arts, because a lot of times in our culture, we don't let anybody be ahead of us. I never listened to my father, but I always listened to my instructor. That's his or her power. Now, some aspects of Asian culture are just completely frigging garbage. When I was coming up as a young instructor, I was more Korean than the Koreans. I was rougher and meaner than they were; when I walked into my school, eight hundred people stood up and bowed. And I think there's a natural process of evolution as a leader where you have to let go of that kind of control. A lot of martial arts is influenced by the Japanese and by the military, and I think we have to evolve beyond the limitations of those cultures and start looking for heroes outside the martial arts community. We have to look to the Nobel Peace Prize winners or

More than some assailant wearing a mask in an alley, it's our mediocrity we have to worry about, our acceptance of the status quo.

others like that to find the path, because it's not often that we're going to find spiritually evolved heroes in the martial arts.

WIE: *In the name of freedom, many of us grew up rebellious, self-centered, and suspicious of structure and discipline, and more often than not, as a result, we have not done so well in our adult lives—as parents, for example.*

CALLOS: The yin-yang symbol that Bruce Lee used isn't there by accident—you need structure and discipline, and you

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Mastery

All UBBT students must commit the following to memory:

MASTERY in our career and consciousness simply requires that we constantly produce results beyond the ordinary. Mastery is the result of consistently going beyond our limits. For most people, it starts with technical excellence in a chosen field and a commitment to that excellence. If you are willing to commit yourself to excellence, to surround yourself with things that represent excellence, and to pursue events and experiences that become miracles, your life will change. (When we speak of miracles, we speak of events or experiences in the real world that are beyond the ordinary.)

It's remarkable how much mediocrity we live with, surrounding ourselves with daily reminders that the average is acceptable. Our world suffers from terminal normality. Take a moment to assess all of the things around you that encourage you to remain average. These things keep you powerless, unable to go beyond a limit you have arbitrarily set for yourself. Take your first step towards mastery by removing everything in your environment that represents mediocrity, removing your arbitrary limits. Try surrounding yourself with friends who ask more of you than you do. Didn't some of your best teachers, your coaches, your parents expect more from you?

On the path to mastery, erase any resentment you have towards masters. Develop compassion for yourself so that you can be in the presence of masters and grow from the experience. Rather than comparing yourself and resenting people who have mastery, remain open and receptive; let the experience be like the planting of a seed within you—with nourishment, it will grow into your own individual mastery.

Correction is essential to power and mastery. You see, we are all ordinary. But a master, rather than condemning himself for his ordinariness, will embrace his ordinariness and use it as a foundation for building the extraordinary. Instead of giving up, as many ordinary people do, he will use his ordinariness to correct his errors, which is essential in the process of attaining mastery. You must be able to correct yourself without invalidating or condemning yourself, to accept results and improve upon them. Correct, don't protect.

Based on a speech by Stewart Emery

also need the freedom from structure that makes creativity possible. The magic of the martial arts is rooted in personal development, and as you progress, you evolve. Once you feel like you can defend yourself, for example, then that's no longer a concern. You begin to understand the free-flowing nature of movement and form and the importance of breathing and clearing your head and focusing on one thing at a time. Now, at my age and level of experience, the highest level of martial arts that I know is the ability to be spontaneous and to create on the fly and not to be hemmed in by structure. Surprise and creativity and experimentation are where it's at in my world.

Bruce Lee put up a mock gravestone in his LA studio that said, "In memory of a once fluid man crammed and distorted by the classical mess." He felt restrained by inflexibility in the martial arts world—rigidity about the arts themselves, but also about life. Was it Lao-tzu who said that the one kind of tree that blows over in the wind is the one that's unbending? Life is about yielding and letting go, you know, blowing over and coming back up. I tell my students in the test that if your goal is to be a master martial artist, then you're really missing the mark. Because your goal should be to be an evolved human being. Being a warrior is not big enough—it's too small a piece of the pie. We often use the metaphor of the warrior in the martial arts, and I think we aspire to be warriors because we consider it to be noble. But it's much harder to be a self-actualized human being than it is to be a warrior.

WIE: *But I thought the classic definition of the warrior was very positive—that to be a warrior meant to be spiritually awake and deeply centered, to fearlessly embrace life and change?*

CALLOS: The positive dimension of being a warrior is the spiritual path that the warrior takes. When I was a kid starting out, my instructors gave us five simple concepts: courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, and indomitable spirit. And the warrior's path, in a positive light, goes back to what my instructors said to me then—that *I* was my worst enemy. As simple and as clichéd as that sounds, it's the essence of martial arts training.

Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo, was one of the first guys to attach the word "*do*," or "way," to martial arts, making it a way of life. And the way is conquering yourself. You know, I wish it were something more complicated, some science we could apply, because that would make it a lot easier. But it really comes down to the warrior's journey. If you're looking at yourself as if you're on a journey, then there's going to be a story written. Now what will that story be? Are you Odysseus going on a quest? Are you being a victim, or are you an active

If your goal is to be a master martial artist, then you're really missing the mark. Because your goal should be to be an evolved human being.

participant? Are you punishing yourself for making mistakes, or do you learn from them? How fully have you embraced a sense of personal responsibility for what happens in the world?

WIE: *Is there any way that you would reinterpret the path of the warrior for modern times?*

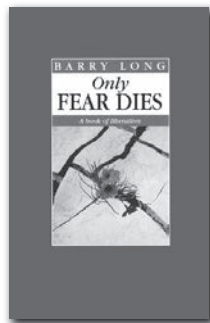
CALLOS: I've made my life out of self-defense, and I've come to realize that the average person like me is more likely to get wiped out by relationship issues than by a physical attack. I would wager that more people will be hurt or die this year as a result of things we have done to our environment than will be hurt or killed by kicks and punches in the next decade. More than some assailant wearing a mask in an alley, it's our mediocrity we have to worry about, our acceptance of the status

quo. It's our lack of awareness of what we're doing to the rest of the planet.

I heard recently that if everybody in the United States just kept their tires properly inflated, we'd save a hundred million barrels of oil in a year—as much as we'll produce by drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Now that kind of concept is what the Ultimate Black Belt Test is all about. It's about taking small things and, because of the amount of people doing them or because of the length of time you do them, having them turn into something that really makes a difference. Lao-tzu said, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." And the modern path of the warrior is a spiritual quest that anybody can take. ■



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Getting Clear



About Enlightenment

Not Just a Book Review of Arjuna Ardagh's
*The Translucent Revolution: How People Just Like You
Are Waking Up and Changing the World*

by Tom Huston



NEO-ADVAITINS ANONYMOUS

“Work, family, busy schedules, relationships: all seemed to sabotage simplicity. . . . The situation was the same everywhere. The realization was incredibly easy; living it was the challenge.”

The Translucent Revolution, pp. 3-4

These days, we’re all used to seeing Deepak Chopra’s winning smile peeking out at us from the checkout lane of our local Stop & Shop. Neale Donald Walsch’s *Conversations with God* and James Redfield’s *Celestine Prophecy* seem to be pretty ubiquitous too—archetypes of spiritual-but-not-religious Americana. Still, despite their omnipresence, and despite whatever degree of spiritual merit they actually do possess, they can’t quite prepare one for encountering a treatise about authentic “nondual” enlightenment for sale right next to the Twinkies and the Ho-Hos.

I’m referring to *The Power of Now*. Published a few years ago, but just recently released in paperback, German mystic

Eckhart Tolle's lucid and accessible exegesis on the highest of spiritual attainments has sold over two million copies (sales that were due, in no small part, to Oprah Winfrey's 2002 televised endorsement of the book as one she has read eight times and keeps on her bedside table). The endless popularity of New Age and self-help books notwithstanding, these figures are sur-

“A Neo-Advaitin could
be your neighbor, your
gardener, or your favorite
bartender, and you'd never
be the wiser.”

prising because Tolle's mystical manifesto is popularizing and conveying a level of spiritual depth that has typically remained inaccessible to all but a chosen few. In fact, with its constant emphasis on transcending the “egoic mind” and powerful transmission of the awakened state of timeless presence, *The Power of Now* is like pop spirituality on steroids. Yet it is also merely the most visible book in a genre that over the past decade, has been working harder than ever to bring enlightenment down from the mountaintop of esoteric traditions like Zen and Sufism and cast it free into the secular mainstream.

Discarding the dogma of the past, stripping mysticism of its religious and ritualistic trappings, the authors of these new books about enlightenment—people like Byron Katie, Satyam Nadeen, and Gangaji—stand united in their claim that the true nature of reality is an “open secret,” available to anyone bold enough to take a good look at the world beyond the alluring sheen of the conceptual mind, right here and right now. And if we do look, what will we see? Why, they say, nothing other than reality as it actually is: a vast oneness—or, more properly, a *nonduality*—that has been variously called God, Spirit, the Self, the Absolute, Nirvana, Consciousness, Emptiness, or the Ground of Being.

Seeing themselves at the lead of this primarily Western mystical reformation are the assorted men and women known, loosely, as the *Neo-Advaitins*. A nonsectarian derivation of the ancient Hindu sect of Advaita (“nondual”) Vedanta, the Neo-Advaitins are a strange breed, transcending time and place, ritual and tradition, class and creed. A Neo-Advaitin could be your neighbor, your gardener, or your favorite bartender, peacefully going about his or her business while remaining half-submerged in the primordial Ground of Being, and you'd never be the wiser. Indeed, the ability of Neo-Advaitins to blend seam-

lessly into everyday life is one of their most distinguishing features. While it's true that some have chosen to stand out from the crowd by taking on the role of spiritual teacher, adopting the name of a Hindu god or an Indian river, or spending years sitting on the same park bench every day, the majority clearly prefer to lead nondescript, ordinary lives, just like you and me. There's only one crucial difference: the Neo-Advaitins act fully in accord with the one enlightened truth—the experiential recognition that *God is all there is*—while the rest of us go about our business in a disconnected daze.

At least, that's the ideal.

With the recent publication of *The Translucent Revolution: How People Just Like You Are Waking Up and Changing the World*, by Arjuna Ardagh, the hard truth about Neo-Advaita may finally have been revealed.



NOTES FROM THE NONDUAL UNDERGROUND

“When I took a good look at my relationship with my own family, with my friends, and with the earth, I had to admit I . . . saw a schism between the depth of realization and the quality of my life.”

The Translucent Revolution, p. 4

Arjuna Ardagh was a successful Seattle-based hypnotherapist before becoming a popular teacher of the Neo-Advaitin way. In 1991, after two decades of spiritual seeking—including many years as a student of the controversial guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (a.k.a. Osho)—he experienced a “radical awakening” to his true, nondual Self with the aid of his second Indian guru, the Advaita Vedanta master H.W.L. Poonja. Returning to the West Coast of America after spending a year in the company of his teacher, Ardagh started offering *satsang*, or “communion in the truth,” to roomfuls of spiritual seekers multiple times a week. But over the next few years, he began to realize that

merely experiencing the truth of Neo-Advaita wasn't necessarily sufficient to transform a person's life in any fundamental way at all—including his own.

"I found myself and my friends in an interesting predicament," he writes in his 1998 manual of personal transformation, *Relaxing into Clear Seeing*. "Having seen the perfection underlying all apparent imperfection, there is no turning back. You cannot unsee what has been seen. . . . Yet for almost everyone I know there has appeared to be some coming and going, some deep, invisible mechanism that pulls consciousness back into separation, desire, suffering, and time." Along with the apparent instability of their spiritual attainments, Ardagh and some of his fellow Neo-Advaitins began to confess that their conscience had been pricked by certain aspects of their outer lives that didn't reflect their inner realizations of universal oneness. "I was fortunate to have many deep and honest friends who also played the role of 'spiritual teacher,'" he writes in *The Translucent Revolution*. "These teachers were respected, successful, and of immense service to many people. Yet, like their students, they were challenged by the gap between the teaching and its embodiment in their daily lives."

So, faced with such a predicament, staring squarely at the disturbing divide between one's spiritual understanding and one's actions in everyday life, what is a good Neo-Advaitin to do?

In *As It Is: The Open Secret to Living an Awakened Life*, Neo-Advaitin Tony Parsons writes: "A great deal of confusion has been generated . . . concerning the need to overcome the ego, the mind, thoughts, etc., and none of it is relevant. . . . If any of these things are active, then they will be active regardless of the idea that you can have any influence on their manifestation. When awakening happens, then everything is seen as absolutely fine just the way it is." And Neo-Advaitin Steven Harrison explains in *Getting to Where You Are*: "There is no inner and outer. There is no engaged spirituality. . . . There is nothing to engage that is outside the movement of our own conceptualization. And there is no place to stand from which to engage this constant flow of interpretation. Thought has divided the world. Conveniently the problem is out there, or in there, but not here, now."

In other words, the Neo-Advaitin solution to the question of a gap between one's knowledge and one's actions is essentially: *Don't worry, be happy!* For the Neo-Advaitin is never puzzled, troubled, or at a loss for words. Holding steadfast to a vision of reality that transcends the "flow of interpretation" generated by the rational, thinking mind, the Neo-Advaitin sees all things clearly, and all is understood. The thoughts and actions of the "human monkey," whatever they may be, are enjoyed with a smile and a wink—as nothing but the empty dance of the one infinite Consciousness that alone is real. Any ideas about a

separation between one's words and deeds, any gnawing sense that one is living in a state of deepening hypocrisy, are seen merely as dualistic thoughts and feelings—and therefore perfectly irrelevant in light of the nondual truth. "Once awakening happens," Parsons assures us, "it is seen that there is no such thing as right or wrong."

But Arjuna Ardagh doesn't buy it anymore. Not all of it, at least. Breaking ranks with the Neo-Advaitin army of thought-free wisdom, Ardagh, through his Living Essence Foundation, is pioneering a new kind of spirituality—one that strives to integrate the revelation of nondual simplicity with all of the natural complexities and challenges of our very human lives. And if the 170 similarly minded teachers and theorists interviewed for his 500-page *Translucent Revolution* are any indication, he is by no means alone in this quest.

YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION?

Trans•lu•cent

n. 1. *an individual who has undergone a spiritual awakening deeply enough that it has permanently transformed their relationship to themselves and to reality, while allowing them to remain involved in ordinary life in a process which is evolutionary and endless.*

2. *an individual with a glowing appearance, as though light were passing through.*

The Translucent Revolution, p. 51

According to the numerous voices quoted on every page of *The Translucent Revolution*—which became a bestseller within just ten days of its release this past summer—there is a massive spiritual awakening happening right now among the most unlikely of individuals, in the most unlikely of places, all over the world. And if Ardagh's presentation is accurate, it would appear that as a result of this widespread revelation, a new class of Post-Neo-Advaita mystics has finally arrived.

Dubbed "translucents" by Ardagh, these new harbingers of spiritual liberation are, like the Neo-Advaitins, potentially everywhere among us. In fact, if you've ever had a spiritual experience or penetrated beyond the veil of duality into a glimpse of the nondual Self, you too may be a "budding translucent" without even knowing it. "Along with hundreds of writers and teachers," Ardagh writes, "I've checked with dentists, hairdressers, housewives, and hoboes. I've asked politicians, drug dealers, and my tax consultant. I regularly ask

whoever is sitting next to me on the plane. All over the world, from every imaginable background and system of belief, people report the trance of separation being broken.”

So what, exactly, are the characteristics of translucence? In the words of Ardagh:

Translucent people . . . have access to their deepest nature as peaceful, limitless, free, unchanging, and at the same time they remain fully involved in the events of their personal lives. . . . They play vigorously in their relationships with others, their work, their creativity, and their political and environmental causes, but they play to play more than to win. . . . They generally don't follow one particular teacher, teaching, or group, although many have in their past. . . . They generally don't identify themselves as “enlightened” or as having attained anything, and they are also not trying to become enlightened. . . . The word translucent refers to the degree of embodiment of a realization, not to what has been realized. Hence it is a relative term, like interesting, inspiring, boring, or idiotic.

Translucents, in other words, are those spiritual-but-not-religious individuals who have, at least to some degree, resolved the mystery of how to manifest the truth of nonduality in their daily lives. But Ardagh didn't begin the translucence

“Translucence” initially means the tricky union of nondual simplicity with our messy human lives.

phenomenon, he merely named it; for more than a decade, he studied the qualities of an emerging spiritual subculture that now numbers, according to Ardagh's interview with sociologist Paul Ray, “somewhere between one and two million people in the United States,” with a similar quantity in Europe. Ardagh elaborates: “Duane Elgin, another sociologist, has come to similar conclusions and is even more optimistic in his estimates. If researchers like Ray and Elgin are right, this is very significant and good news. It is this shift, in these kinds of numbers, to which every spiritual tradition has aspired.”

But before we release the confetti and break out the champagne, let's take a closer look at the contours of this “translucent revolution.” When did it begin? Where is it going? And just how revolutionary is it, anyway?

FLATLAND: HOME OF THE SENSITIVE SELVES

“As recently as the 1980s, the awakening shifts . . . were quite rare. Today such experiences of ‘poking through’ the fabric of our normal trance state of desire, fear, and self-preoccupation are becoming increasingly common, especially during the last decade of the twentieth century.”

The Translucent Revolution, p. 40

Few would contest that the 1960s was a revolutionary decade, exploding with idealistic passion at every turn. With the en masse rebellion against the authoritarian status quo—represented by everything from the civil rights movement to animal rights, feminism, Vietnam War protests, and a truly remarkable indulgence in sex, drugs, and rock and roll—the events of that era changed the world forever. And they did so at the only level at which profound and lasting sociocultural change has ever occurred: the level of human consciousness.

The Boomer mind (aided, naturally, by LSD and Eastern philosophy) stretched itself toward a vision of humanity's higher potentials, which ushered an entirely new perspective into the Western world. Transcending the dogmatic strictures of premodern thought and dismissing the rigid, mechanistic simplicity of modernity, the Boomers cemented into our collective consciousness the *postmodern* worldview. This worldview, which defines all “liberal” and “progressive” thinking today, arises from a level of consciousness marked by an impressive capacity to consider multiple perspectives at once. Relativism, pluralism, egalitarianism, and multiculturalism are among its many names, and in its extreme manifestations, it has also been called “flatland”—crushing, as only it can, all hierarchical distinctions and potentially offensive value judgments in the name of a compassionate and universal equality.

At its peak, this new consciousness was believed by many to represent the dawning of a “new age,” and in some ways that hopeful intuition has proved true. Over the past forty years, the postmodern worldview—and the social world it spawned—has given individual human beings more personal freedoms than any other sociocultural context in history. But at the same time, its emphasis on individual rights has resulted in an unprecedented fragmentation of traditional moral values, agreed-upon truths, and shared spiritual ideals. “Your truth/my truth” has become the clichéd but accurate refrain of our depth-deprived culture, as we all go about our lives with our own unique personalized belief systems, values, and identities in tow—bathed, as cultural

critic Thomas de Zengotita puts it, in a “psychic sauna” of self-reflective multimedia and secure in the bubble of our easy isolation. Because of the self-obsessed and overinflated bubbles in which most people do abide, the typical postmodern citizen has often been described as a “sensitive self”: someone unusually respectful of the rights of others, yet easily offended, frequently victimized, and in constant need of affirmation to boost his or her self-esteem.

It is within this postmodern cultural climate, for better or worse, that *The Translucent Revolution* has arrived.

THE VARIETIES OF POSTMODERN EXPERIENCE

“Find a friend, a lover, your sister, your mother, a colleague. Now sit them down, maintain eye contact, and tell them five things you appreciate about them. . . . Notice what happens within as you give and then receive appreciation. Try this when you have a small- or medium-size issue between you, and see if you can still remember it after doing this exercise.”

The Translucent Revolution, p. 165

The Translucent Revolution obviously owes much to the sixties revolution, and seems to be the latest heir to at least two of the sixties’ most enduring pop-cultural lineages: one that began with Thomas Anthony Harris’s self-help megaseller *I’m OK—You’re OK* and the other with Ram Dass’s spiritual classic *Be Here Now*. Like *Be Here Now*, Ardagh’s book skillfully points us back to our already-liberated Self beyond time, mind, and duality. And like *I’m OK—You’re OK*, it epitomizes the postmodern worldview—unfortunately, even to the point of supporting the ultrarelativistic condition known as flatland and therefore catering effusively to the postmodern sensitive self.

Ardagh’s essential premise is that human beings can transform in profound ways: first by awakening to our eternally perfect Self beyond the conditioned mind and body and then by continually cracking the hard shell of “Iago” (his Shakespeare-inspired term for the nasty and manipulative human ego) in order to allow that Self to shine with increasing brightness through more and more facets of our lives. We can learn to do this through various translucence-cultivating “Nudges” and “Try It Yourself” exercises that appear at the end of nearly every chapter. Surprisingly, however, the vast majority of these techniques are simply strategies of the kind

one would expect to find in any postmodern self-help book, aimed to aid us in becoming kinder to others (and ourselves) while still accepting all of our personality quirks as perfectly fine just as they are. Believing that any motivation to transform the personality could only ever come from Iago—the narcissistic, false sense of self—Ardagh says, “Nudging . . . is more of an art form than a kind of psychotherapy. Feeling our personality to be essentially unfixable, we abandon any serious effort to improve it and instead recycle the parts to create art. Nudging is not for the ‘me’ but rather a way to loosen and melt this sense of separate ‘me’ so that inherent translucence can glow more brightly.”

But that’s just the tip of *The Translucent Revolution*’s sensitive-self-help iceberg. Consider, also, its many encouragements to “welcome your lost children [i.e., feelings] back home” while whispering “a quiet ‘yes’ under your breath”; or the detailed discussions of how we can learn to discover “real celebration of another”; or the endlessly soothing quality that pervades much of the text, particularly when it comes to dealing with the Iago within in order to become more translucent (“It is our family, friends, students, coworkers, even our cat, rabbits, and pet rats who help nudge us back into translucence every day. We ask them to. By the time you are done reading this book you will have many nudging games to play. . . . But *puhleeze* don’t get too holy about it. We’ve all done that ad nauseam”).

Now, nudging games are all well and good, especially once the family pet gets involved, but before we play, can we at least agree on what the goal is? As Ardagh’s treatise progresses through major chapters on translucent relationships, sex, parenting, art, education, business, health care, and religion, his conception of what “translucence” means gets increasingly broad and vague. While it initially indicates the tricky union of nondual simplicity with our messy human lives (“individual translucence”), it later ends up meaning little more than *the ideal version of postmodern culture itself*—the padded playground of the sensitive selves—freed from the corrupting influence of Iago (“collective translucence”). To Ardagh, a translucent world would be, in effect, a postmodern world purged of its more unsavory blemishes (including those bothersome remnants of premodern religion and modern capitalism—at least as we know them today). And because Ardagh fails to clearly distinguish any stages or levels of development in consciousness and society—such as premodern, modern, and postmodern—he doesn’t seem to perceive the possibility of a radical transformation *beyond* the postmodern sensitive self, as though human beings have always been this way or will never progress any further.

TRANSFORMATION HESITATION

“As soon as we have to say no to something, we develop a point of view. As soon as we say black but not white [or] good and not evil . . . we’ve split our otherwise undivided universe into this and not that and chosen one over the other. . . . Like cutting a melon in two, we choose to keep one half and push the other half away.”

The Translucent Revolution, pp. 96–97

In a state of meditative absorption in the transcendent nondual Self, reality is directly realized to be a seamless whole, eternally perfect and complete. There’s no time, there’s no mind, and so there’s nothing much going on. But from the normal, relative self’s perspective, there are plenty of things happening all the time, with the mind racing and the clock ticking as we strive to navigate the vicissitudes of the human experience in the midst of an ever-changing world. How to integrate these two *very* different dimensions of our experience into a singular expression of human wholeness seems to be exactly what

making clear (albeit unintentionally) that the merging of nondual consciousness with postmodern relativism could arguably be the greatest obstacle yet to the continued evolution of contemporary spirituality. Why? Because, interestingly enough, the universal *egalitarianism* of the sensitive self and the universal *oneness* of the nondual Self just so happen to present strikingly similar relationships to the everyday world—ones that are comfortably numb to dualities, differences, and opposites of any kind. And whenever you have a sensitive self as the human vehicle for the nondual Self, the combined neutrality of those two selves will inevitably flatten all potentially meaningful distinctions and value judgments into the ground.

Lest they take a “position” in life or maintain a critical stance of some kind, sensitive selves typically do whatever they can to remain firmly in the neutral zone of inoffensive ambiguity. With their sophisticated postmodern cognition wisely perceiving the relativity of all opposites—how light shades into darkness or how “up” could not exist without “down”—sensitive selves choose to abide in the gray areas of life, vocally opposed to sharp distinctions and judgments of any kind. Moreover, once they have a deep spiritual experience, they

Whenever you have a sensitive self as the human vehicle for the nondual Self, the combined neutrality of those two selves flattens all distinctions and value judgments into the ground.

Ardagh is pointing us to. That is “translucence.” As he himself suggests, it’s something that most Neo-Advaitins—by valuing the absolute over the relative in their one-sided “homogenous goo of Oneness”—would never even consider. There’s only one slight problem: the “translucent” alternative doesn’t stray that far from “homogenous goo” either. In fact, for the past few decades, ever since the mysticism of the East started making friends with the pop psychology of the West, the postmodern spiritual world has been struggling to find a way to integrate the timeless realization of enlightenment with the process of human development in a way that doesn’t simply dissolve one side of the equation in favor of the other. Hence, from a certain point of view, Ardagh’s *Translucent Revolution* is merely the most recent in a series of attempts to create a palatable blend of the absolute and the relative. And like many of its innumerable predecessors, it succeeds in primarily one regard: by

find themselves newly *empowered* in their hazy relationship to life by their realization of the absolute Self—which, being the foundation of absolutely everything, takes no relationship to any particular thing. The Self makes no judgments; the Self makes no distinctions; the Self has no preferences. And if we wish to be translucent, according to Ardagh, then obviously neither should we.

“As we get older, we polarize everything,” he warns. “We start to say *this is acceptable* and *that’s unacceptable*. We inhibit the natural flow of energy in our lives.” Only by freeing ourselves, more and more, of our dualistic judgments, distinctions, and preferences will our transcendent, impersonal Self be able to “continuously marinate the personal and to become ever more embodied . . . [an] endless process of evolution and transformation [called] ‘translucence.’”

Thus conflating the divine *indifference* of the absolute



Self with the friendly *nonjudgment* of the sensitive self, the well-intentioned *nondual relativist* commits a major metaphysical error. It is a confusion of levels of reality, dimensions of ontology—a haphazard merger between the absolute and the relative, the unmanifest and the manifest, being and becoming, emptiness and form. Rather than recognizing fully the difference between these two distinct sides of the coin called Reality and striving to understand the mysterious connection between them, the philosophy of nondual relativism lazily blurs the lines. In the name of “compassion,” its extreme manifestations even whitewash all dualities and opposites—including all of the multidimensional complexity of the human condition—into nondual oblivion.

For instance, in his chapter on “translucent relating,” Ardagh explains how we can learn to make “judgments” while still remaining true to the revelation of the nondual Self—or, at least, without offending anyone (remaining true to the sensitive self). “It really does not matter if you make judgments,”

he writes, “as long as they are inclusive rather than rejecting. Tell your friends that they are lazy or stupid, and you risk losing the friendship. Tell them, ‘You are so lazy, just like me,’ and you may invite empathy. As we call back judgment, we are calling back the fragmented parts of the psyche we have evicted. . . . When we have called back our judgments, our feedback is free of ‘othering’—making it all about another rather than ourselves—and only then can it be received.” (His other examples of calling back judgment include: “He is so arrogant—just like me,” “The Dalai Lama is so wise—just like me,” and “You aren’t really listening to me—just like me.”)

Clearly, true translucents—or nondual relativists—are sweet and generous people, going out of their way to make sure that not a single soul is offended and all are embraced. (Just like me.) But could the very saccharinity that makes a nondual relativist so spiritually reassuring also be surreptitiously sedating the soul of everyone he or she encounters? By immediately “calling back” all criticisms or judgments, the nondual

relativist virtually guarantees that he or she abides perpetually in flatland, the spiritual ice rink of the sensitive selves. Liberated from the responsibility of ever having to challenge another, the nondual relativist revels in human relationships that remain smoothly uninspiring. Any impulses to rise up, to change and grow to a higher level of spiritual integrity, are happily nullified on the spot. Flatland reigns, and the sensitive self is soothed. And the real reason behind all this is that the sensitive self is acknowledged, by the nondual relativist and the Neo-Advaitin alike, to be *pretty much perfect* just as he or she is (beyond the unnecessary flow of critical thinking generated by the time-bound psyche). Never mind that Ardagh's book is peppered with injunctions to help us to "change" and "grow" and "evolve"; when it comes down to it, it seems that the perspective of a nondual relativist never rises more than a few inches from the ground.

Indeed, if there is a central tenet to the translucent revolution, it is the conviction that apart from the deluded views of Iago-consciousness, all human beings are the same perfect Self, essentially equal in every way. Beyond the mind, beyond belief, there can be no meaningful distinctions between oneself and anyone else. Elucidating this egalitarian ideal in his chapter on parenting, Ardagh, the father of two sons, writes: "Translucent parenting means to see our utter incompetence to teach anyone anything useful at all. Don't follow me, I'm lost." The eternal and infinite Self Absolute, as the only certain truth in this relativistic world, will somehow take care of the complexity of the *human* predicament all by itself. We need only get out of the way in order to let it shine through.

OUR TRANSLUCENT FUTURE

"Maybe we are not climbing a mountain at all; maybe we are exploring a meadow or a forest."

The Translucent Revolution, p. 5

Where is this all headed? What kind of a world is Arjuna Ardagh really envisioning? In the last chapter of *The Translucent Revolution*, he considers three potential near-future scenarios for a world on the brink of catastrophic collapse due to the insidious effects of Iago-consciousness everywhere, including: 1) "total annihilation"; 2) "global crisis"; and 3) "the miracle." In the first, the "damage to the environment, the continuing violence fueled by blind fundamentalism, the disparities of our economic system are all so great, and the number and effect of translucents is so small, that we are heading for extinction

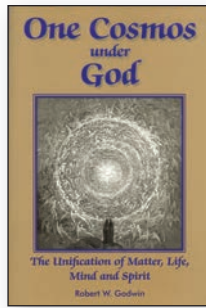


within our lifetime." In the second, "we survive" but Western civilization has crumbled, and the world is in a state of chaotic disorder, with translucents braving plagues of suffering and despair through "a very flexible sense of humor." And in the third scenario, "the translucent paradigm is already well in place," and no matter what happens, the situation will "only fuel the global awakening." Ardagh doesn't favor one scenario over any other but concludes that, whatever happens, cultivating our translucence is the only way we will ever defeat the Iago mind within and without. That may be true, but given what I now know of translucency, I think it's only fair to share a fourth vision of the future that seems the most attuned to the facts at hand.

Imagine: coming over the endlessly flat horizon, waving white flags against a clear blue sky, the translucent revolution marches toward the Iago battalions, determined to unleash a few million friendly blows to humankind's perennial adversary. Despite the natural flow of their collective gait, every translucent soldier marches to his or her own cadence, singing his or her own favorite tune. Some wear boots, some wear sandals, and even though all are dressed exactly as they please, there is no religious paraphernalia to be seen. Finally approaching the vicious Iago ranks, the translucents begin to laugh—first a few, then rippling out more and more—after suddenly realizing the familiar mistake they've made. How could they have fallen, again, for the foolish belief in opposites, for the ridiculous story of "others"? Sitting upon the empty ground, they playfully nudge each other back and forth, smiling into each other's eyes. At first, they don't notice as the Iago forces descend upon them, and when they finally do wake up to the carnage all around, they can't quite take it seriously enough to do anything about it. Hours later, sadly, the translucent revolution is no more. Stepping over the remains of its softly luminous foe, the Iago army marches in tight formation toward the horizon, looking forward to many future victories in a world too kind to care. ■

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ONE COSMOS UNDER GOD

The Unification of Matter, Life, Mind and Spirit

by Robert W. Godwin

(Paragon House, 2004, paperback \$19.95)

We can best make sense out of human history, according to psychologist Robert W. Godwin, if we recognize it as the chaos and turmoil resulting from our continuous reach toward “vertical lift-off”—our evolutionary desire to realize a consciousness that will take us beyond “mere biological, Darwinian existence.” In his astonishing first book, *One Cosmos under God*, Godwin offers a fine example of such liftoff. It’s a soaring tribute to the intellectual and spiritual heights a human being can reach by stretching to take in the whole fourteen-billion-year trajectory of the cosmos. With creative exuberance and analytic precision, Godwin tackles the most fundamental human questions and explores them from an evolutionary perspective that leaves neo-Darwinism almost literally in the dust. For Godwin, humanity did not arise out of the random ricocheting of matter but in the upward pull of everything toward a telos, toward pure spirit or Godhead itself. In the august tradition of Teilhard de Chardin and Sri Aurobindo, Godwin turns history on its head by arguing that evolution cannot be explained by the march of prior events but only through the recognition of an acausal dimension of life that both precedes everything and awaits its full manifestation in the future. And this perspective on creation and evolution sheds new light on some of the most intractable puzzles of existence.

One Cosmos begins and ends in “re-Joyceful” word play, self-consciously

imitating James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. Yet this is play with a serious purpose, as Godwin puns with various and sundry terms expressing humanity’s love affair with the absolute, infinite, and sacred to describe the birth of the cosmos and our merging with it. Sandwiched in between his punning preface and postscript are four books that explore each dramatic stage of life’s progression: *Cosmogogenesis*, the creation of matter; *Biogenesis*, the development of life; *Psychogenesis*, the birth of thought; and finally *Cosmotheosis*, the ultimate stage (“It’s a Onederful Life!” Godwin puns) that is yet to come. This last stage entails “the transcendence of the local self and union with the living God. . . . [A] blessedly mixed marriage [that] is not an undifferentiated oneness, nor a static twoness, but a dynamic twoness in Oneness experienced both outwardly and inwardly, in an ecstatic union of finite and Infinite.” Each of these distinct stages, Godwin reminds us, was unforeseeable, unimaginable from what had come before. He calls each, in its own way, a *singularity*: a point at which the then-current reality became so saturated, so charged, that a radical break happened with all that had gone before and suddenly something *new* blasted into existence.

For Godwin, this creative potential reveals a cosmic intention toward consciousness, toward Self-knowing. Godwin (“Your Man in Nirvana reporting from the serene of the climb”) unfolds the purpose of human life from the top down, from the radical endpoint of our sacred “cosmobliteration” or Union with the Divine. “Evidently,” he comments, “the universe is filled with . . . ‘empty’ fields of pure logos awaiting a nervous system sophisticated enough to evoke them. In other words, [the nondual], which exists outside time and space, may actually require a time-bound nervous system to manifest locally.” This cosmic strange attractor that we call the Divine exerts a constant pull upwards on the consciousness and development of humanity.

From this top-down perspective, the conclusions that Godwin draws make profound and unexpected sense. Conventionally, we look at the historical development of life out of matter, arguing that the universe is fundamentally

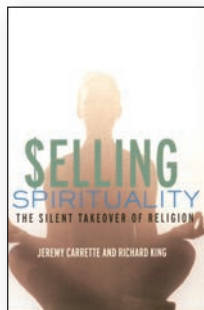
dead and empty and that life is some strange and random coincidence that emerged from nonlife. This, in effect, elevates death—the absence of all life—to the level of a foundational principle in the universe itself. Which, Godwin asserts, it is not. “*All death is local*,” he writes. “Unlike Life, which must be a nonlocal, immanent spiritual principle of the cosmos, there can be no metaphysical principle called ‘death.’ Rather, there are only cadavers and corpses, strictly local areas where Life is no longer concentrated and outwardly visible at the moment.” Thus, life is the central principle of the cosmos—and that has profound implications regarding who we are and where we are going.

One Cosmos under God is one of those rare books that consistently jolts us out of the decrepit beliefs that structure our understanding of ourselves and the world. However, the enormity of the task that Godwin is undertaking does mean that some of his ideas are not fully and clearly presented. For example, his provocative concept of “antievolutionary mind parasites” (compulsive patterns in the human psyche) is never adequately explained, and so, remains a tantalizing but vague idea. Also, he offers a new symbolic lexicon to replace oversaturated spiritual and religious terms that hold so many, and often conflicting, connotations. He notes that the term *God* has become “so overloaded with cultural, historical, and idiosyncratic personal meanings that its use for communication with others is extremely problematic.” (One wishes that he would have considered this before adopting the title *One Cosmos under God*.) His admirably creative response—a new symbolic language to describe the spiritual dimension—ends up lacking warmth, depth, and richness because his abstract symbols are, in fact, meaningless. (For example, in his lexicon he uses the symbol [•] to represent the ego-identified self.)

But his fundamental point that the terms we use to describe Spirit should be filled with *experience* rather than beliefs or concepts is well taken. “Few of us have the means or resources to carry out original research in physics,

biology, or neurology," he says. "However, each of us has the equivalent of our own particle accelerator [our own mind and consciousness] with which to carry out the most sophisticated psycho-spiritual research." And the subtle discrimination and wide vistas that he shares from his own quest for deeper understanding show what is possible from the new inner science that he points us toward. Deeply influenced by the great Indian sage and consciousness explorer Sri Aurobindo, Godwin has clearly engaged in his own spiritual atom-splitting to have produced such a remarkable integration of science, psychology, and spirit. *One Cosmos under God* is a thrilling contribution to the emerging canon of evolutionary thought—one that leaves us eager to embark on the next journey with this daring cosmic dharmanaut.

Elizabeth Debold



SELLING SPIRITUALITY

The Silent Takeover of Religion

by Jeremy Carrette and Richard King (Routledge, 2004, paperback \$22.95)

Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, authors of *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, have developed a theory that is both disturbing and sadly convincing. According to these authors, today it is spirituality, not religion that, as Karl Marx famously wrote in 1844, has become "the opium of the people," sedating and numbing us to the state of the world and our own souls. As a matter of fact, they argue, spirituality—that which we trust to be the fountainhead of meaning, mystery, and value in life—has undergone nothing short of a "corporate takeover" and has become the latest victim of neoliberal ideology, a

modified form of liberalism that values free-market capitalism above all else. "In our view," Carrette and King write, "this reflects a wider cultural reorientation of life according to a set of values that commodifies human experience and opens up the space for the corporate takeover of all human knowledge and life."

The confluence of economics and spirituality has produced what the authors call "New Age capitalism," a "brand name for the meaning of life" that reinterprets religious and spiritual truths to benefit the profoundly individualistic and materialistic postmodern person. According to Carrette and King, New Age capitalism's overriding characteristic is the hawking of "personalised packages of meaning . . . rather than offering recipes for social change and identification with others." And this popular form of spirituality, lacking any shared definitions or the context of tradition, is too easily co-opted by "the desiring machine of consumerism." The result is that instead of providing effective paths for social transformation, spirituality is now little more than a balm that soothes us, helping us to cope with and perhaps feel a little better about the harsh realities and existential hurdles of the modern world.

Throughout the book, Carrette and King explain in great detail how the religious traditions and institutions that have historically bound humans to one another in an ethical, moral, and social contract have lost their relevancy and power. They refer to this process as the "privatisation of religion," and they claim it occurred in two distinct phases: first, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the Enlightenment relegated religion to the private sphere of the individual; and second, in the 1960s when new forms of religious experimentation, particularly with the Asian traditions, exploded in popularity. This gave birth to an extreme fascination with "peak experiences," resulting in what Carrette and King call "a peculiar orientation and obsession with the individual self as the source of authority." Working in tandem, these two developments—the void of established religions and an unmoored spirituality rooted in personal satisfaction—meant that capitalism, materialism, and consumerism became the

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overwhelming forces of our individual lives and our culture as a whole.

Both Carrette and King are British university professors in religious studies, and each is well versed (you could almost say entrenched) in postmodern theory and academia. Their research interests traverse everything from early Advaita Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism to William James, the theology of economics, and gender studies. What distinguishes them from other postmodern theorists and makes *Selling Spirituality* a unique and often brilliant social critique is that their neo-Marxist look at modern spirituality is entirely nonsecular. Indeed, the most important point of the book may be Carrette and King's assertion that any movement opposed to the spread of neoliberal ideology *must* transcend the "secular boundaries of its own critique." "Moreover," they write, "for the vast majority of the world's population, a 'secular' ideology that de-sacrilises the world far too easily ends up turning it into a commodity. This suggests that avowed secular ideologies may be part of the problem rather than the solution."

At times, Carrette and King's own spiritual interests and outright disgust for the narcissism of the day are passionately displayed on the pages of the book. It's as if they are—incredibly—transcending the secular, post-modern academic genre while at the same time managing to invoke the work of Foucault, Nietzsche, and Freud to extend the "hermeneutics of suspicion" to spirituality. Nevertheless, it is sometimes frustratingly difficult to understand Carrette and King's prescriptions, few as there are. Though both insist that the West cannot return to the traditions of the past, they also hint that engaging with the world's religions may be our only effective response to neoliberalism's "de-sacrilisation" of life. Only once in the book do they explicitly state what they mean in this regard, citing Mexico's Catholic Zapatistas' Third-World liberation theologies, the Chipko movement of the Himalayas, Thich Naht Hanh's Socially Engaged Buddhism, and the Swadhyaya movement in Western India as examples of movements that successfully draw upon traditional religions while responding to the destructive effects of globalization. But without a thorough

discussion of how these movements could be pragmatic models outside their indigenous countries, effective for those of us in the West actually saturated in "capitalist spirituality" and the capitalist system, the idea that these are the types of models we so badly need, either socially or spiritually, remains unconvincing.

At times complex and demanding, it would be unfair to recommend *Selling Spirituality* as a good beach read. Nor does it offer a substantial vision of authentic future forms of spirituality. Nevertheless, nothing could be more important than understanding the true extent to which spirituality has been co-opted by the forces of materialism and our insatiable hunger for spiritual palliatives rather than real solutions. *Selling Spirituality* will show you how this has happened and what the cost may be with a satisfying and rare sophistication. As Carrette and King tell us, "the most troubling aspect of many modern spiritualities is precisely that they are not troubling enough."

Maura R. O'Connor



CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA
His Life and Vision

by Fabrice Midal

(Shambhala Press, 2004, hardcover \$26.95)

From the moment I picked up a copy of this first official biography of the Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa (1939-1987), I was hooked. Written by Fabrice Midal, a French philosophy professor and devotee of Trungpa's teaching, *Chögyam Trungpa: His Life and Vision* is a comprehensive account of the humble beginnings, outrageous life, and incomparable work of this still controversial icon in the history of Buddhism in America.

The son of nomadic herders,

Chögyam Trungpa was born in a cowshed on the high plains of eastern Tibet. He was recognized at thirteen months of age to be the eleventh incarnation in the lineage of Trungpa *tülku*s (reborn, enlightened Buddhist masters). The peasant child, now a prince, was enthroned in a ceremony attended by twelve thousand monks and lay people. His intensive monastic education would formally begin at the age of five. Like those before him, Trungpa was destined to become a revered individual, the spiritual head of all the monasteries in the Surmang region of Tibet and a major figure in both the Kagyü and Nyingma schools of Tibetan Buddhism. All this came to pass before he reached the age of twenty.

This was to be a pivotal year in Trungpa's life, when all similarity between him and his predecessors would end. In 1959, the Chinese army invaded Tibet and Trungpa was forced to leave his homeland, never to return. He fled to India, where he served as spiritual advisor for the Young Lamas Home School in Dalhousie, then traveled to England to study comparative religion, philosophy, and fine arts under a Spaulding Fellowship at Oxford University. Four years later he moved to Scotland and founded Samye Ling, the first Tibetan Buddhist practice center in the West. But Trungpa attracted few serious students there, and in general, he felt looked upon as "an example of a species, rather than as an individual." Concluding that his position, with its privileged status and elaborate rituals, kept him out of touch with his surroundings, the Vidyadhara Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche surrendered his monastic vows, married, and in 1970, set off for America. Deep in the midst of its own cultural upheaval, America was ripe for exactly the sort of authentic contact Trungpa sought. What better place to redefine an entire tradition than in the rebellious firmament of an entire generation intent on rejecting the old and discovering the new? The creative synergy between them was explosive. Over the span of just seventeen years, Trungpa wrote two dozen popular books, founded Naropa (the first Buddhist-inspired university in America), established over one hundred urban practice and rural retreat centers around the world, and garnered

thousands of students along the way. In the annals of East-meets-West spirituality, Chögyam Trungpa's meteoric fire lit up the entire sky.

It is at this point in the book that Midal's exposition of Trungpa's life really comes alive. He artfully portrays Trungpa's prolific creativity by dedicating each of his twenty-three chapters to a different facet of his life and work. He shows us Trungpa the accomplished artist and innovator, an expert in the traditional arts of calligraphy, haiku, archery, and ikebana. Trungpa seemed to bend everything he did to a dharmic purpose in order to directly express the impermanent, the spontaneous, the cosmic, or to reveal the fundamental goodness of life itself. He invented original expressions for the dharma in its new Western home, creating unique forms of theater, poetry, painting, and even psychotherapy. Trungpa could be outrageous and austere, disciplined and freewheeling, as when he set out to install arcane forms of hierarchy into the structures of his community and instill marshal discipline into his students who, true to their

time, tended to be entirely casual.

Midal portrays Trungpa's own personal conversion, from an icon of traditional religion into America's first authentic crazy wisdom teacher, as the highest expression of his teaching art. Trungpa immediately discarded all remnants of traditional attitude and attire, favoring jeans and T-shirts at first, suits and ties later on. He peppered his public talks with slang and expletives; he smoked cigarettes and drank. Like some kind of shape-shifting Trojan horse, he made himself appear as one of us, drawing us into his world without suspicion, and then completely transformed himself—and us with him—creating something entirely new.

Free from all constraints, Trungpa reveled in his ability to shatter any convention. The result was that the life he lived sometimes looked more like that of a rock star than of a reincarnated saint. He worked hard, but he partied equally hard. He drank excessively and habitually, even during public teaching events. He slept with a different woman any night he wished. But no matter

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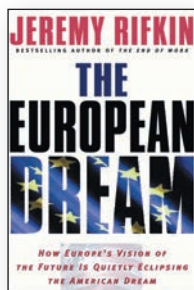
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how outrageous he seemed to others, Trungpa himself always insisted that it was all carefully designed to shock us out of *our* complacency, to uproot *our* rigid preconceptions—that it was fundamentally an expression of freedom in the highest sense: the fully realized expression of Tantric Buddhism. Although Midal discusses these aspects of Trungpa's life in two small subchapters, he essentially steers away from the harder questions, allowing any lingering sense of unresolved contradiction to remain. Given the dramatic effects these behaviors ultimately had on Trungpa's life and legacy, some greater soul-searching would not have been unwelcome and might have brought some fresh insight to an enduring and intractable mystery.

Chögyam Trungpa: His Life and Vision is, in the final analysis, an awesome book about a towering figure, which, after coursing through its five-hundred-plus pages, generated more interest than it satisfied. I even began to wonder what he might have accomplished had he chosen a less controversial path and were still with us today. There he'd be, I thought, working tirelessly to bring into reality his dream of Shambhala, the vision of an enlightened kingdom on earth that so consumed him in the years before his death. Just for a moment, I imagined I saw what could have been, what a far richer world he might have created, for us and for the future.

Richard Klein



THE EUROPEAN DREAM

How Europe's Vision of the Future Is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream

by Jeremy Rifkin

(Tarcher/Penguin, 2004, hardcover \$25.95)

Perhaps in the future, historians will note that an American introduced the

European dream to the world. Jeremy Rifkin, president of the Foundation on Economic Trends in Washington, DC, observes that a new vision emerging in Europe is beginning to eclipse the American dream. In his groundbreaking book, *The European Dream*, Rifkin argues that an unbroken two hundred years of American cultural ascent has now become a liability, tying America and Americans to a past that is no longer relevant to our global reality. Simply put, his thesis is that a global vision for the world is not emerging in the United States—it is emerging in Europe.

In an excursion through history, Rifkin describes how the philosophical foundation of the early American republic created its success, and is now its limitation. The Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, which started in Europe, were brought to America. The Puritan work ethos combined with the ideas of private property, the free market, and the nation-state created the powerful ideological basis for the United States to become an unprecedented success as a nation. But in a globalizing world, Rifkin asserts, where many of the biggest economies are not nations anymore but corporate businesses, and where the world consists of a more and more closely interrelated network of corporations, states, and civil society organizations, a vision is needed beyond the nation-state and beyond the classic economic model of enlightened self-interest to handle the problems of this planet.

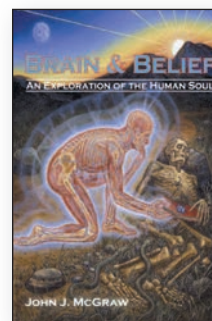
In the European Union, Rifkin sees the embryonic form of a globally viable political vision. Instead of becoming a new superstate, the EU has metamorphosed into a political network that includes nation-states as well as transnational organizations, regional organizations, and civil society organizations. The EU is, in fact, less a place than a process.

The differences between the American and European dreams are striking and evident in the way that each understands fundamental human principles such as "freedom." For Americans, Rifkin notes, freedom is defined through autonomy, through becoming more independent in the world. For Europeans, freedom is found more through "embedded-

ness," through entering relationships that give access to more options. In other words, the more communities to which one has access, the greater the potential for a full and meaningful life. Rifkin emphasizes both how new and how unique this experiment is, noting that the language for the draft of the European constitution is like no other political document because it expresses a universalism that does not speak of a people, a territory, or a nation. Rather, it speaks about humanity as a whole and about the planet that we share. It will be the first constitution in history to be guided by an awareness of our single global reality.

Will Europe make its dream manifest? In the final analysis, Rifkin is uncertain. Criticizing Europe for its pessimism and xenophobia (which, since he wrote this book, derailed and delayed the ratification process of the constitution), he wonders if Europe will have the stamina to become a full manifestation of its own dream, and he even suggests that Southeast Asia might be more likely to bring a global vision to full expression. But right now, Europe is the birthplace of a new political era.

Thomas Steininger



BRAIN AND BELIEF

An Exploration of the Human Soul

by John McGraw

(Aegis Press, 2005, paperback \$14.95)

The title of John McGraw's recent book, *Brain and Belief: An Exploration of the Human Soul*, is misleading. It would have been more accurate to call it *Brain and Unbelief: A Deconstruction of the Human Soul*, because McGraw is simply not a believer in any religious sense of the term. And his primary interest in the soul is in freeing humanity from the idea that it exists. In fact, the thesis of his

quite impressive but also quite polemic survey of the history, philosophy, and science of the human soul is that there is no difference between the soul and the brain. Brain and belief, in other words, are inextricably linked.

For McGraw, our growing understanding of the human brain is the Trojan horse that is slowly but doggedly undermining the foundation of almost all religious and spiritual thought. It is deconstructing the age-old idea that we are both material and spiritual beings, that we have not only a body but also a soul. In fact, McGraw writes with an open distaste for religion and is one of those who simply cannot understand how modern people could believe in the existence of a spiritual dimension of life. To his credit, he does not try to hide his own agenda. In fact, he states clearly at the outset of the book that his goal is to deliver us from premodern illusions of an immortal soul; to encourage us to finally, as he puts it, "give up the ghost."

In the introduction, McGraw remembers a defining moment in his young life. As a six-year-old child, he visited his great-grandfather in the hospital, and he remembers looking into the empty and confused eyes of his relative perched at the edge of death. "Something human looked at me but something human was missing," he writes, and it was in the shock of that missing essence that McGraw realized that the idea of the soul was an illusion. He understood that "Santa Claus is not real," that "despair is genuine," and that "all comes to naught," meaning that there is no life to be expected beyond death. "Life after death is a phrase so hopelessly inept in logic that it defies the word oxymoron," he writes a few pages later. But like any good scientist, he wants to prove his point. And he sets out to do just that, through looking more closely at the "historical and ontological" notion of the soul and at the science of the human brain. The idea is to examine what we are learning about the latter and unlearning about the former. In this respect, he is a master teacher, and the first third of the book is a fascinating tour through the history of the idea of the soul in the religions of the world. He traces this literal "ghost story" to early animistic beliefs, with their conviction that "a

spiritual substance persists behind all material things." This paved the way for shamanism and the notion of a spirit world where life and self-awareness extend beyond the boundaries of the physical body. He traces how shamanism in turn influenced Greek philosophy, then Christianity, and also Hinduism and other Eastern religions. And he identifies the first true, unambiguous dualist (someone who believes that the soul is independent from the physical body) as being Zoroaster (or Zarathushtra).

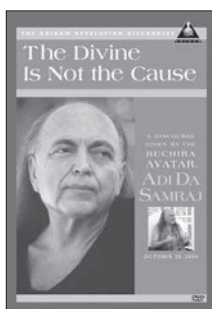
There is, no doubt, much truth to McGraw's historical overview, though he is clearly looking at history through the filters of his own predetermined conclusions about the soul. Indeed, it's no accident that he emphasizes the influence of shamanism, with its use of psychoactive drugs in religious ceremonies. It serves his larger thesis: that the idea of the soul, and by extension religion, came in large part from the manipulation of brain states through psychoactive substances, coupled with the fear of death. "The poignancy of the relationship between drugs and religion," he writes, "lies at the foundation

of our notions of a disembodied self." There is nothing wrong with interpreting historical data to support a thesis, but McGraw has a bad habit of stating his antireligious interpretations as if only the mentally challenged would not draw the same conclusion.

The second third of *Brain and Belief* more or less follows the same pattern as the first, this part exploring the nature of the human brain and giving an equally compelling overview of many of the new discoveries regarding the gray matter between your ears. Want to know why caffeine gives you a buzz? How Alzheimer's affects the brain? McGraw has it all covered and gives a detailed account of the ins and outs of brain science and the challenge that it is presenting to our conventional ideas of self. (For an in-depth exploration of the spiritual implications of recent discoveries in neuroscience please see Craig Hamilton's article, "Is God All in Your Head?" in the June–August 2005 issue of *WIE*.)

Finally, in the last third of the book, titled "Giving up the Ghost," McGraw makes a more direct case for moving human thought beyond the "beautiful

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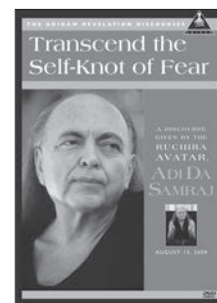
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lie”—the idea of an immortal soul. This section is also an educational journey, but a more philosophical one, as he explores humanity’s relationship to death over the millennia. It includes an extended reflection on *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the oldest known works of literature—part of ancient Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and Hittite culture—whose subject is the quest (ultimately a fruitless and ill-fated one) for immortality. And McGraw ends with his own preferred philosophical systems, a final injunction to “give up the ghost” and a quote from Nietzsche, the most oft-quoted figure in the book. In fact, it is no accident that Nietzsche plays such a strong role in McGraw’s own feelings about life. He is clearly drawn to the Existentialists and their inclination to face the raw truth of life without illusions, to face that there may be no salvation, no religion, no God, and no comforting reason for our brief existence in the immense and empty void of the universe.

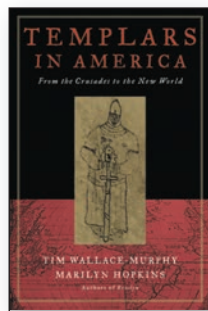
In addition to his existentialist leanings, there is only one religion McGraw can stomach—Buddhism. Now, I don’t know if the fact that a surprising number of scientific materialists, not to mention existentialists, find in Buddhism a nondogmatic psychological system that fits in easily with an anti-religious, antispirit, antisoul, materialistic worldview says something about the great religion itself or simply about the human tendency to see our own reflection in the currents of history. But it is a curious phenomenon that would be worthy of a more detailed analysis. Whatever the case, McGraw finds in the essence of Buddhism (as well as Epicureanism and Stoicism) a workable philosophy for the modern age. Well, almost. Even he balks at the Buddha’s Fourth Noble Truth, the one that offers a way out of suffering, which he calls the Buddha’s only lie.

Brain and Belief is an enjoyable and educational book in many respects, but it is hardly an open-minded exploration of the human soul. McGraw is a fundamentalist, though his fundamentals tell us about the supremacy of matter and the illusions of spirit, not the other way around. He seems like the kind of person who would be fascinating to talk to—thoughtful, intelligent, and curious

about life, a true scientific mind—but whose broader conclusions about the nature of reality should be deeply questioned. In fact, his supreme confidence in those conclusions amounts to a sort of unquestioning faith in materialism that, ironically, echoes the rigid dogmas of much religious theology. Certainly, in an age of science, our traditional conception of the soul must be fundamentally reexamined. But when McGraw triumphantly announces the soul’s demise, he is drawing a conclusion based not on science but on belief. It was this kind of “scientism” that the great religious scholar Huston Smith was referring to when he wrote, “The triumphs of modern science went to man’s head in something of the way rum does, causing him to grow loose in his logic. He came to think that what science discovers somehow casts doubt on things it does not discover; that the success it realizes in its own domain throws into question the reality of domains its devices cannot touch.”

While a scientific fundamentalist is far preferable to a religious fundamentalist, there are simply too many positives contained in both the scientific and the religious worldviews to be satisfied with the dogmatic conclusions of either.

Carter Phipps



TEMPLARS IN AMERICA *From the Crusades to the New World*

by Tim Wallace-Murphy and Marilyn Hopkins
(Weiser Books, 2004, paperback \$17.95)

In *Templars in America*, British scholars Tim Wallace-Murphy and Marilyn Hopkins offer a fascinating account of how, when, and where the Knights Templar came to America—and why. The Order of the Knights Templar (for those few remaining souls who

have not read *The Da Vinci Code*) was founded by the Church in 1118 as a monastic military order to protect Christian pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land. Over several hundred years, they became perhaps the most powerful society of medieval Europe. Authors Wallace-Murphy and Hopkins conclude that Scottish knights who were Templar-connected settled in America nearly one hundred years before Columbus. In 1396, they argue, Prince Henry Sinclair of Scotland and Orkney (whose home was Roslin) led an expedition that reached Nova Scotia and the East Coast of America.

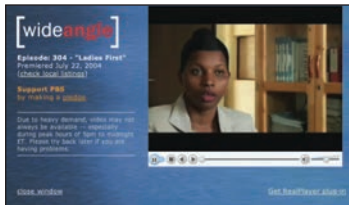
How do the authors come to this conclusion? First, Rosslyn Chapel, in Roslin, Scotland, was built by a branch of these knights in the mid-1400s and was completed more than a decade before the end of that century. It contains carvings of maize (Indian corn), aloe, and other plants native to the New World. The authors then point to little-known facts: evidence of Scottish settlement in Nova Scotia in the fourteenth century, an engraving of a Scottish knight carved into a rock ledge in Massachusetts, and a fourteenth-century tower in Newport, Rhode Island, built in a medieval Scottish style.

But this isn’t what makes *Templars in America* so intriguing. The authors speculate that the knights played a significant role in the founding of the United States. Through their engaging narrative, they take us into esoteric Christianity, Freemasonry, and the apparently secret history of America’s founding. Over time, the authors tell us, the Templars transformed into the Freemasons. Noting that George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Paul Revere, John Hancock, and other founders were Masons, they speculate that America is partly a Templar project. The Templar goal was to establish a new society in the New World, uncorrupted by the Church but based on principles of esoteric Christianity that the knights upheld. Moreover, these principles constitute “a spiritual pathway to enlightenment” encoded in the carvings of Rosslyn Chapel.

Templars in America presents an interpretation of history that is impressive in its scope and significance. While much of it is speculative, the argument

is well grounded and intellectually satisfying. The authors' conclusion, if true, suggests that there was a sacred dimension to the creation of the very structures of American government and society. This spiritual dimension has been omitted from our understanding of history and bears deeper investigation and illumination.

John White



LADIES FIRST

(PBS "Wide Angle" production, 2004, 56 minutes)

A video and multimedia presentation on women in Rwanda, available at www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/shows/rwanda

In 1994, Rwanda experienced what was perhaps the most intense genocide campaign in human history. And yet, as this PBS documentary powerfully conveys, this tiny central African country is miraculously emerging as a global model of social reconstruction and reconciliation. It is an expression of the unimaginable resilience of the human spirit—and in this case, particularly, of women. The statistics, though now well known, continue to defy the moral imagination: 800,000 Tutsis and 50,000 moderate Hutus were brutally killed in a period of just one hundred days. Two million fled to nearby Congo, Tanzania, and Burundi, and more than 100,000 women were raped, many by HIV-positive men. But it is women who are rising up from profound trauma to take the helm "at the forefront of change, transforming the country from the ground up."

In this patriarchal tribal society, women have traditionally had few basic human rights, but most of those massacred were men, leaving women and girls as a seventy percent majority of the population. Recognizing that women had become central to Rwanda's future, the government responded with legislation and quotas that favored the nation's women, allowing them for the first time

to independently own property, have bank accounts, and obtain loans. A thirty percent quota for women representatives was established in parliament, and today they occupy forty-eight percent of the seats in the national legislature, the highest representation of women in the world.

Buoyed by political power, rights, and freedom, Rwanda's women are courageously overcoming grief to address the vast social problems left in the wake of genocide. Faced with extreme poverty and social fragmentation, they have been compelled to begin to trust and help each other across tribal lines, unmooring the country from its tribal roots. In *Ladies First*, we hear the story of Aloisea Inyumba, who organized a plan for the adoption of Rwanda's half-million orphans, appealing to women to adopt these children, whether the women—or the orphans—were Hutu or Tutsi. "Every mother takes one no matter what," was her slogan. Or Epiphanie Mukashyaka, whose husband, child, and "an entire hillside of extended family" were slaughtered in the killings. With the assistance of a micro-loan, she has developed her family's coffee bean plant and is now the largest employer in her rural community, which includes those on both sides of the tribal divide. "I came up with the idea of building this plant," she says, "and nothing was going to stop me."

In an interview at the end of the film, former U.S. Ambassador Swanee Hunt, director of the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, imparts the political significance of women in Rwanda and throughout a developing world that is struggling to rise out of tribalism and into the twenty-first century: "We have a stake in Rwanda's success because we have a stake in the world's stability. . . . If we can support these women, they [can] become a model that could be replicated around the world."

Indeed, the women of Rwanda are a model for the world. With new social and political freedom, they are catalyzing a democratic movement that is rapidly evolving the society beyond tribalism—a fact that Hunt encourages the United States and other countries to take note of and support. In these

women's faces, we see determination and dignity that defy the dark shadow of suffering. It is a feminism born of unimaginable hardship, taking as its task the betterment of an entire nation. And it affirms that which is most miraculous in us: the inexplicable capacity of the human spirit to emerge from the depths of the gravest suffering and chart a new course forward.

Jessica Roemischer

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continued from page 11

as it relates to our common passion for the evolution of consciousness. It is astonishing just how materialistic is the official paradigm that prevails in our era. One of the most powerful—and subliminal—ways in which the biological juggernaut dominates and indoctrinates the public mind is through the technological miracle of brain imaging. Notice that in every colorful comparison you see of the brain activity of “well” versus “ill” subjects, there is never any reminder that an association between brain activity and mental phenomena, in time, does not prove a *causal* relationship. Instead, an apparently purposeful assumption is bred that wherever there is brain activity, it must be causing the mental phenomenon to which it is related. It is like saying that when you throw a switch and a light goes on, the light bulb is causing the light! The electricity is causing the light; the bulb is mediating the phenomenon. Consciousness animates the brain. The brain mediates the phenomenon. Without the brain, consciousness has no vehicle; without consciousness the brain has nothing to manifest.

Howard Taynen, MD
Burlington, Ontario

THE “SCIENCE” OF FUNDAMENTALISM

What a fascinating letter from Thomas Clark commenting on Craig Hamilton’s article on consciousness. I was particularly interested to read that “Any good scientific explanation of experience and behavior will show precisely how higher-level capacities for consciousness, choice, and the sense of self emerge from lower-level, materially instantiated mechanisms.” Now there’s a conversation stopper—if science doesn’t support materialist conclusions, it’s not good science.

Mr. Clark does not define what he means by “science,” but he uses the word as a kind of magic mantra. He then selects one instance of “New Age ‘frontier science’”—psi phenomena—to beat about the head and shoulders. To use the term “New Age” immediately sets up a straw man, for who of us wants to be associated with the “New Age”? (Shudder.) I can only assume

he’s referring to anyone not agreeing with the materialist-reductionist position. He gives no examples of who the real “scientists” are, but presumably he would not include Bohm, Combs, Gebser, Grof, Kegan, Kohlberg, Prigogine, Sheldrake, Varela, Einstein, Lovinger, Newberg, Chalmers, etc. Although these and hundreds more have impeccable credentials and have done thousands of legitimate research studies on consciousness, we may pass them off as New Age loonies who seek only “to protect the mysteries of the mind from the specter of mechanism.”

It seems that fundamentalism is not peculiar to religion alone. Ah, well. If I have a choice for a conversation and a beer with someone, I’ll choose Wilber or Cohen rather than “a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.”

Ron Shafer
Decatur, IL

CAUSALITY STINKS

When I was a doctoral student in neurobiology, the clinical neurology professor entered the room the first day and announced, “If you can’t measure something, it doesn’t exist. If you’re here to learn about the role of the mind and emotions in illness, you have an emotional problem, and you can leave class now.” The mind/brain duality is still alive twenty-five years later because analytic science is incapable of resolving it. As long as we approach the question from a causal and analytic perspective, the materialist will always consider the mind to be a byproduct of the nervous system and the spiritualist will always consider consciousness to be the organizing force behind matter.

However, there is another approach that eliminates the need to determine causality in the relationship between mind and brain. The simple fact is that emotions, thoughts, and brain chemistry change *simultaneously*. Taking an inductive and synthetic approach, we can look at the momentary state of an organism to arrive at a truly integral perspective that includes its objective chemistry as well as its subjective experience. Just such a functional view

is the basis of all traditional Asian sciences, such as Chinese medicine and Ayurveda. While the mind/brain duality may never be resolved, I believe that a truly integral approach—one that unites modern imaging technology with four thousand years of functional observation of mind and spirit by the premodern sciences—will lead to an explosion of insights into the interpenetration of mind and matter that have the potential to benefit humanity medically as well as spiritually.

Lonny S. Jarrett
via email

ELEVATING THE FEMININE

I was very happy to see your article “Where Are the Women?”—thank you! Recently, I have been reading and enjoying *WIE*, but I feel largely left out of the picture, and I think this is because I am a woman. The issue of women is close to my heart, and I had many thoughts in response to what you wrote. In my opinion, the biggest spiritual challenge today is still, as it has been in this culture for centuries, recognition of and respect for women and the feminine aspects of life.

So the question to me is not “Where are the women?” but “How can we appreciate women and what they represent more?” Women, being largely feminine, are less hierarchical and more circle-oriented, and we are a gentle group by nature and necessity. The feminine represents curves, softness, openness, spirituality (inner guidance and affirmation of life), inclusiveness (relationship), growth (ritual and transformation), holistic thinking, nurturing and support. Where do these values fit into today’s world? Where do they stand in the marketplace?

No discussion of spirituality will be productive until it includes elevating the position of women and what they do for us. The heart of spirituality is love—appreciation and kindness—and women, as holders of these values, are still not recognized or validated for their contribution or its importance. Because the feminine is not loud and aggressive, it needs the support of

the masculine to take leadership—the masculine must volunteer to let it have that role. *WIE* could help us take a major step in this direction by acknowledging and encouraging this.

Men supporting women—what a concept!

Sharon Maser

Santa Rosa, CA

ED. NOTE

We have received an unprecedented flood of letters from women in response to Elizabeth Debold's article "Where Are the Women?" We chose to print Sharon Maser's letter as a representative example because her fundamental points have been echoed by many. Look for Debold's response in the next issue of What Is Enlightenment? in the next installment of "Where Are the Women?"

EVOLVING PAST PRIMITIVE NEEDS

Well done, Dr. Debold. As a young woman committed to evolving consciousness, I continue to be amazed with how we as women sabotage our efforts to transform to a new form of leadership, which the world so desperately needs. I too was rattled when I listened to "Where Are the Integral Women?" on Integral Naked, but I also loved the fact that the question was raised. It's just the prompt we need, and it is sadly time for us all to face this reality. Women need to move beyond our deep primitive need for safety and beyond the competitiveness that exists within us to create a new collective paradigm where we can lead from a new place within. It is time for us to take on this challenge individually—and then to be brave enough to open our hearts, share them with each other, and make room for the magic that the women of today can potentially offer as great leaders, creators, and thinkers.

Sarah McIntyre

Sydney

... AND WHERE ARE THE MEN?

Although Elizabeth Debold's article "Where Are the Women?" had some striking insights, it was also one-

sided—it would have been truer to add "... and Where Are the Men?" to the title.

As an experienced participant in and leader of human potential workshops, I can testify that the preponderance of men in Ken Wilber's workshops is atypical. I'm confident that the vast majority of workshop presenters would confirm that an overwhelming majority of women sign up for most of these workshops. Indeed, where are the men? I wish I could say, "In workshops inspired by the likes of Robert Bly and James Hillman," but that's not the case either—at least not in numbers as significant as in equivalent workshops for women.

It's not that surprising, at least to me, that there would be a preponderance of men attracted to Ken Wilber's work. Much as I admire some of his writings, I also find a tendency to one-sidedness in them. I am a subscriber and enthusiastic reader of *WIE*, but in spite of all the well-intentioned talk in your magazine about "transcend and include," I see in both your "guru" and your "pandit" a tendency to hurry through the including so they can get on with the transcending and "evolving." It would seem that the overuse of the cliché "leading edge" is also symptomatic of this imbalance.

Surely the deep nature of evolution—whether material, psychic, or spiritual—is far more subtle, complex, and mysterious than this.

Joseph Rowe

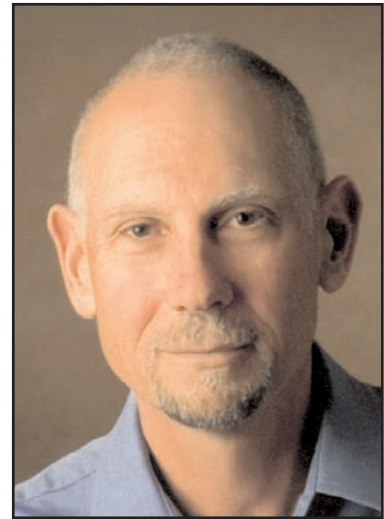
Paris

LONG LIVE WIE!

I am enjoying the subscription to *WIE*... and the befuddled reaction of my staff as they observe their crusty, arch-conservative/libertarian/quasi-anarchist/reactionary/Bush-supporting/unprogressive boss reading it at lunchtime. The magazine delightfully resists being pigeonholed and remains wonderfully unpredictable. Long may it thrive, under whatever name.

Don Dixon

Long Beach, CA



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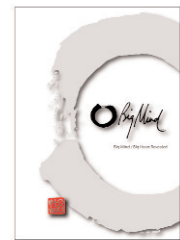
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Good Old-Fashioned Virtues for a New World

by Andrew Cohen

I can well remember the scene: I was sitting in a hotel coffee shop in Vancouver having an intimate conversation with a fellow spiritual teacher whom I was meeting for the first time. He was telling me in excruciating detail how, after ingesting a powerful psychotropic substance, he had, over a period of many months, repeatedly gone in and out of psychotic states, turning his life into a living nightmare that ultimately led to the dissolution of his community. Unselfconsciously, he went on to describe how his world had almost completely unraveled, how much of the time he had held on to his own sanity by only a thread, and how angry and disillusioned many of his students had become. After he finished his harrowing tale, he looked up from his coffee cup, smiled, and then said, “So, Andrew, now tell me about *your* shadow . . .”

In the East, if someone is purported to be enlightened, it is traditionally assumed that they no longer have an ego. But if, in spite of a profound awakening, the enlightened one realizes that the ego is still alive and kicking, he or she usually pretends that it’s not. In the West, we have come to understand that in all but the rarest cases, the ego, in fact, does not die. Despite the sustained experience of higher states of consciousness, the narcissistic separate self-sense seems to almost always survive in the end. Many of us have recognized this and have also seen what happens when someone tries to feign a level of development beyond ego they have not authentically attained. The result is a personality that expresses an even greater level of pretense than it did before it became “enlightened.”

Slowly but surely, most Western spiritual teachers, masters, and gurus have concluded not only that it’s not *really* possible to transcend ego but also, even more significantly, that any serious aspiration to do so is foolhardy, outmoded, and misguided. The once-noble intention to truly rise up and transcend the petty, self-serving, and often destructive impulses of the ego has been replaced by a more “mature” acceptance of ourselves, “warts and all.” Indeed, it seems that self-acceptance has become the new face of higher development. And in the spiritual mentor, this can be demonstrated as astounding displays of brutal honesty regarding personal faults, shortcomings, and humiliating self-indulgence. This often startling willingness to “bare one’s soul” is considered to be more a hallmark of spiritual evolution today than the good old-fashioned virtues of courage, honor, dignity, self-respect, purposefulness, and excellence.

There is a striking lack of a vertical dimension, or upward pull, in our postmodern spiritual-but-not-religious culture.

That culture’s pervading belief structures are unknowingly preventing the kind of evolutionary, or spiritual, development that it claims to champion. Many have experienced states of consciousness that have revealed glimpses of higher levels of development that dramatically transcend the insidious narcissism and endless self-referencing of our powerful egos. But the ethos of the cultural context in which these experiences are occurring inhibits a natural desire or impulse to rise up, to stretch, to consciously strive to reach those higher stages that revealed themselves in the ecstasy of spiritual revelation. So, in the end, nothing actually changes.

Without even knowing it, we have become deeply cynical about our own potential to truly evolve in real time. Even the way we speak with each other reveals our cynicism. Another spiritual teacher I know has a favorite phrase: “Everybody’s crazy.” Once, in a friendly conversation with him, I found myself in the difficult position of being unwilling to include myself with “everybody” else. The truth is, I don’t think I am crazy. But these days, that’s a politically incorrect thing to say and that’s why I was so uncomfortable.

The role of the spiritual mentor in an *evolutionary* context, as I see it, is to represent our higher and deeper potentials. We are here to create *tension*, a life-positive, evolutionary tension that powerfully compels others to meet us at that higher and deeper level. But we will never be able to serve that function effectively as long as we feel we need to be apologists for our own foibles. Unless our awakened passion for evolution, enlightenment, and the promise of a new world is unfailingly more powerful than our ego’s endless needs and unfulfilled desires, then maybe we shouldn’t be teaching.

The problem with our spiritual-but-not-religious culture is that we have no enlightened philosophical context, no ethical or moral code, no higher spiritual principles that we feel *obliged* to uphold. That is, unless we *feel* like it. I believe that we need to create a *new* post-traditional religious context for the human experience, one that is based upon a consciously acknowledged aspiration and obligation to *evolve*. The very nature of such a living, vibrant, intersubjective spiritual context implicitly expects, if not explicitly demands, a *higher* order of human engagement, one that is based upon good old-fashioned virtues such as honor, dignity, respect, propriety, and loyalty to the best part of ourselves—loyalty and obligation to *that* which is truly sacred, to that alone which gives life meaning. ■